PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 180

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
THIRTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 1990-91

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Alexander, Richard Thain (Newark)
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Allason, Rupert William Simon (Torbay)
Allen, Graham William (Nottingham, North)
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Amery, Rt.Hon. Harold Julian (Brighton, Pavilion)
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Bennett, Nicholas Jerome (Pembroke)
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Boateng, Paul Yaw (Brent, South)
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Browne, John Ernest Douglas Delavalette (Winchester)
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Buckley, George James (Hemsworth)
Budgen, Nicholas William (Wolverhampton, South-West)
Burns, Simon Hugh McGuigan (Chelmsford)
Burt, Alistair James Hendrie (Bury, North)
Butcher, John Patrick (Coventry, South-West)
Butler, Christopher John (Warrington, South)
Butterfill, John Valentine (Bournemouth, West)

C

Caborn, Richard George (Sheffield, Central)
Callaghan, James (Heywood and Middleton)
Campbell, Ronald (Blyth Valley)
Campbell, Walter Menzies CBE QC (Fife, North-East)
Campbell-Savours, Dale Norman (Workington)
Canavan, Dennis Andrew (Falkirk, West)
Carlile, Alexander Charles QC (Montgomery)
Carlisle, John Russell (Luton, North)
Carlisle, Kenneth Melville (Lincoln)
Carr, Michael (Bootle) *[By-election, May 1990] [died, July 1990]*
Carrington, Matthew Hadrian Marshall (Fulham)
Carttiss, Michael Reginald Harry (Great Yarmouth)
Cartwright, John Cameron (Woolwich)
Cash, William Nigel Paul (Stafford)
Chalker, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Lynda (Wallasey)
Channon, Rt. Hon. Henry Paul Guinness (Southend, West)
Chapman, Sydney Brookes (Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher Robert OBE (Southampton, Itchen)
Churchill, Winston Spencer (Davyhulme)
Clark, Hon. Alan Kenneth McKenzie (Plymouth, Sutton)
Clark, David George (South Shields)
Clark, Michael (Rochford)
Clark, Rt. Hon. Sir William Gibson (Croydon, South)
Clarke, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Harry QC (Rushcliffe)
Clarke, Thomas CBE (Monklands, West)
Clay, Robert Alan (Sunderland, North)
Clelland, David Gordon (Tyne Bridge)
Clwyd, Mrs. Ann (Cynon Valley)
Cohen, Harry Michael (Leyton)
Coleman, Donald Richard CBE (Neath)
Colvin, Michael Keith Beale (Romsey and Waterside)
Conway, Derek Leslie (Shrewsbury and Atcham)
Cook, Francis (Stockton, North)
Cook, Robert Finlayson (Livingston)
Coombs, Anthony Michael Vincent (Wyre Forest)
Coombs, Simon Christopher (Swindon)
Cope, Rt. Hon. John Ambrose (Northavon)
Corbett, Robin (Birmingham, Erdington)
Corbyn, Jeremy Bernard (Islington, North)
Cormack, Patrick Thomas (South Staffordshire)
Couchman, James Randall (Gillingham)
Cousins, James Mackay (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central)
Cox, Thomas Michael (Tooting)
Cran, James Douglas (Beverley)
Critchley, Julian Michael Gordon (Aldershot)
Crowther, Joseph Stanley (Rotherham)
Cryer, George Robert (Bradford, South)
Cummings, John Scott (Easington)
Cunliffe, Lawrence Francis (Leigh)
Cunningham, John Anderson (Copeland)
Currie, Mrs. Edwina (South Derbyshire)
Curry, David Maurice (Skipton and Ripon)

D

Dalyell, Thomas (Linlithgow)
Darling, Alistair Maclean (Edinburgh, Central)
Davies, Rt. Hon. David John Denzil (Llanelli)
Davies, John Quentin (Stamford and Spalding)
Davies, Ronald (Caerphilly)

Davis, David Michael (Boothferry)
Davis, Terence Anthony Gordon (Birmingham, Hodge Hill)
Day, Stephen Richard (Cheadle)
Dean, Sir Arthur Paul (Woodspring)
Devlin, Timothy Robert (Stockton, South)
Dewar, Donald Campbell (Glasgow, Garscadden)
Dickens, Geoffrey Kenneth (Littleborough and Saddleworth)
Dicks, Terence Patrick (Hayes and Harlington)
Dixon, Donald (Jarrow)
Dobson, Frank Gordon (Holborn and St. Pancras)
Doran, Frank (Aberdeen, South)
Dorrell, Stephen James (Loughborough)
Douglas, Richard Giles (Dunfermline, West)
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James (Edinburgh, West)
Dover, Densmore Ronald (Chorley)
Duffy, Albert Edward Patrick (Sheffield, Attercliffe)
Dunn, Robert John (Dartford)
Dunnachie, James Francis (Glasgow, Pollok)
Dunwoody, Hon. Mrs. Gwyneth Patricia (Crewe and Nantwich)
Durant, Robert Anthony Bevis (Reading, West)
Dykes, Hugh John Maxwell (Harrow, East)

E

Eadie, Alexander BEM (Midlothian)
Eastham, Kenneth (Manchester, Blackley)
Eggar, Timothy John Crommelin (Enfield, North)
Emery, Sir Peter Frank Hannibal (Honiton)
Evans, David John (Welwyn Hatfield)
Evans, John (St. Helens, North)
Evennett, David Anthony (Erith and Crayford)
Ewing, Harry (Falkirk, East)
Ewing, Mrs. Margaret Anne (Moray)

F

Fairbairn, Sir Nicholas Hardwick QC (Perth and Kinross)
Fallon, Michael Cather (Darlington)
Farr, Sir John Arnold (Harborough)
Fatchett, Derek John (Leeds, Central)
Faulds, Andrew Matthew William (Warley, East)
Favell, Anthony Rowland (Stockport)
Fearn, Ronald Cyril (Southport)
Fenner, Dame Peggy Edith (Medway)
Field, Barry John Anthony (Isle of Wight)
Field, Frank (Birkenhead)
Fields, Terence (Liverpool, Broadgreen)
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey MBE (Hampstead and Highgate)
Fishburn, John Dudley (Kensington) *[By-election, June 1988]*
Fisher, Mark (Stoke-on-Trent, Central)
Flannery, Martin Henry (Sheffield, Hillsborough)
Flynn, Paul Phillip (Newport, West)
Fookes, Dame Janet Evelyn (Plymouth, Drake)
Foot, Rt. Hon. Michael Mackintosh (Blaenau Gwent)
Forman, Francis Nigel (Carshalton and Wallington)
Forsyth, Michael Bruce (Stirling)
Forsythe, Clifford (South Antrim)
Forth, Eric (Mid-Worcestershire)
Foster, Derek (Bishop Auckland)

Foulkes, George (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
Fowler, Rt. Hon. Sir Peter Norman (Sutton Coldfield)
Fox, Sir John Marcus MBE (Shipley)
Franks, Cecil Simon (Barrow and Furness)
Fraser, John Denis (Norwood)
Freeman, Roger Norman (Kettering)
French, Douglas Charles (Gloucester)
Fry, Peter Derek (Wellingborough)
Fyfe, Mrs. Maria (Glasgow, Maryhill)

G

Galbraith, Samuel Laird (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)
Gale, Roger James (North Thanet)
Galloway, George (Glasgow, Hillhead)
Gardiner, George Arthur (Reigate)
Garel-Jones, William Armand Thomas Tristan (Watford)
Garrett, John Laurence (Norwich, South)
Garrett, William Edward (Wallsend)
George, Bruce Thomas (Walsall, South)
Gilbert, Rt. Hon. John William (Dudley, East)
Gill, Christopher John Fred RD (Ludlow)
Gilmour, Rt. Hon. Sir Ian Hedworth John Little (Chesham and Amersham)
Glyn, Sir Alan ERD (Windsor and Maidenhead)
Godman, Norman Anthony (Greenock and Port Glasgow)
Golding, Mrs. Llinos (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
Goodhart, Sir Philip Carter (Beckenham)
Goodlad, Alastair Robertson (Eddisbury)
Goodson-Wickes, Dr. Charles (Wimbledon)
Gordon, Mrs. Mildred (Bow and Poplar)
Gorman, Mrs. Theresa Ellen (Billericay)
Gorst, John Michael (Hendon, North)
Gould, Bryan Charles (Dagenham)
Gow, Ian Reginald Edward TD (Eastbourne) *[died, July 1990]*
Gower, Sir Herbert Raymond (Vale of Glamorgan) *[died, February 1989]*
Graham, Thomas (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde)
Grant, Bernard Alexander Montgomery (Tottenham)
Grant, Sir John Anthony (South-West Cambridgeshire)
Greenway, Harry (Ealing, North)
Greenway, John Robert (Ryedale)
Gregory, Conal Robert (York)
Griffiths, Sir Eldon Wylie (Bury St. Edmunds)
Griffiths, Nigel (Edinburgh, South)
Griffiths, Peter Harry Steve (Portsmouth, North)
Griffiths, Winston James (Bridgend)
Grist, Ian (Cardiff, Central)
Grocott, Bruce Joseph (The Wrekin)
Ground, Reginald Patrick QC (Feltham and Heston)
Grylls, William Michael John (North-West Surrey)
Gummer, Rt. Hon. John Selwyn (Suffolk, Coastal)

H

Hague, William Jefferson (Richmond, Yorks) *[By-election, February 1989]*
Hamilton, Hon. Archibald Gavin (Epsom and Ewell)
Hamilton, Mostyn Neil (Tatton)
Hampson, Keith (Leeds, North-West)
Hanley, Jeremy James (Richmond and Barnes)
Hannam, John Gordon (Exeter)
Hardy, Peter (Wentworth)
Hargreaves, Andrew Raikes (Birmingham, Hall Green)
Hargreaves, Joseph Kenneth (Hyndburn)
Harman Ms. Harriet Ruth (Peckham)
Harris, David Anthony (St. Ives)
Haselhurst, Alan Gordon Barraclough (Saffron Walden)
Hattersley, Rt. Hon. Roy Sydney George (Birmingham, Sparkbrook)
Hawkins, Christopher James (High Peak)
Hayes, Jeremy Joseph James (Harlow)
Hayhoe, Rt. Hon. Sir Bernard John (Brentford and Isleworth)
Haynes, David Francis (Ashfield)
Hayward, Robert Antony (Kingswood)
Heal, Mrs. Sylvia Lloyd (Mid-Staffordshire) *[By-election, March 1990]*
Healey, Rt. Hon. Denis Winston CH MBE (Leeds, East)
Heath, Rt. Hon. Edward Richard George MBE (Old Bexley and Sidcup)
Heathcoat-Amory, David Philip (Wells)
Heddle, Bentley John (Mid-Staffordshire) *[died, December 1989]*
Heffer, Eric Samuel (Liverpool, Walton)
Henderson, Douglas John (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, North)
Heseltine, Rt. Hon. Michael Ray Dibdin (Henley)
Hicks, Mrs. Maureen Patricia (Wolverhampton, North-East)
Hicks, Robert Adrian (South-East Cornwall)
Higgins, Rt. Hon. Terence Langley (Worthing)
Hill, Stanley James Allen (Southampton, Test)
Hinchliffe, David Martin (Wakefield)
Hind, Kenneth Harvard (West Lancashire)
Hoey, Catharine Letitia (Vauxhall) *[By-election June 1989]*
Hogg, Hon. Douglas Martin QC (Grantham)
Hogg, Norman (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth)
Holland, Stuart Kingsley (Vauxhall) *[Resigned, May 1989]*
Holt, James Richard (Langbaurgh)
Home Robertson, John David (East Lothian)
Hood, James (Clydesdale)
Hordern, Sir Peter Maudslay (Horsham)
Howard, Rt. Hon. Michael QC (Folkestone and Hythe)
Howarth, Alan Thomas CBE (Stratford-on-Avon)
Howarth, George Edward (Knowsley, North)
Howarth, James Gerald Douglas (Cannock and Burntwood)
Howe, Rt. Hon. Sir Richard Edward Geoffrey QC (East Surrey)
Howell, Rt. Hon. David Arthur Russell (Guildford)
Howell, Rt. Hon. Denis Herbert (Birmingham, Small Heath)
Howell, Ralph Frederic (North Norfolk)
Howells, Geraint Wyn (Ceredigion and Pembroke, North)
Howells, Dr. Kim Scott (Pontypridd) *[By-election, February 1989]*
Hoyle, Eric Douglas Harvey (Warrington, North)
Hughes, John (Coventry, North-East)
Hughes, Robert Gurth (Harrow, West)
Hughes, Robert (Aberdeen, North)
Hughes, Royston John (Newport, East)
Hughes, Sean Francis (Knowsley, South) *[died, June 1990]*

Alphabetical List of Members

Hughes, Simon Henry Ward (Southwark and Bermondsey)
Hume, John (Foyle)
Hunt, Rt. Hon. David James Fletcher MBE (Wirral, West)
Hunt, Sir John Leonard (Ravensbourne)
Hunter, Andrew Robert Frederick (Basingstoke)
Hurd, Rt. Hon. Douglas Richard CBE (Witney)

I

Illsley, Eric Evelyn (Barnsley, Central)
Ingram, Adam Paterson (East Kilbride)
Irvine, Michael Fraser (Ipswich)
Irving, Sir Charles Graham (Cheltenham)

J

Jack, John Michael (Fylde)
Jackson, Robert Victor (Wantage)
Janman, Timothy Simon (Thurrock)
Janner, Hon. Greville Ewan QC (Leicester, West)
Jessel, Toby Francis Henry (Twickenham)
John, Brynmor Thomas (Pontypridd) *[died, December 1988]*
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey (Wealden)
Johnston, Sir David Russell (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber)
Jones, Gwilym Hadyn (Cardiff, North)
Jones, Ieuan Wyn (Ynys Môn)
Jones, Martyn David (Clwyd, South-West)
Jones, Robert Brannock (West Hertfordshire)
Jones, Stephen Barry (Alyn and Deeside)
Jopling, Rt. Hon. Thomas Michael (Westmorland and Lonsdale)

K

Kaufman Rt. Hon. Gerald Bernard (Manchester, Gorton)
Kellett-Bowman Dame Mary Elaine (Lancaster)
Kennedy Charles Peter (Ross, Cromarty and Skye)
Key, Simon Robert (Salisbury)
Kilfedder, James Alexander (North Down)
King, Rt. Hon. Thomas Jeremy (Bridgwater)
King, Roger Douglas (Birmingham, Northfield)
Kinnock, Rt. Hon. Neil Gordon (Islwyn)
Kirkhope Timothy John Robert (Leeds, North-East)
Kirkwood, Archibald Johnstone (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
Knapman, Roger Maurice (Stroud)
Knight, Gregory (Derby, North)
Knight, Dame Joan Christabel Jill (Birmingham, Edgbaston)
Knowles, Michael (Nottingham, East)
Knox, David Laidlaw (Staffordshire, Moorlands)

L

Lambie, David (Cunninghame, South)
Lamond, James Alexander (Oldham, Central and Royton)
Lamont, Rt. Hon. Norman Stewart Hughson (Kingston upon Thames)
Lang, Ian Bruce (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale)
Latham, Michael Anthony (Rutland and Melton)
Lawrence, Ivan John QC (Burton)
Lawson, Rt. Hon. Nigel (Blaby)
Leadbitter, Edward (Hartlepool)
Lee, John Robert Louis (Pendle)
Leigh, Edward Julian Egerton (Gainsborough and Horncastle)
Leighton, Ronald (Newham, North-East)
Lennox-Boyd, Hon. Mark Alexander (Morecambe and Lunesdale)
Lester, James Theodore (Broxtowe)
Lestor, Miss Joan (Eccles)
Lewis, Terence (Worsley)
Lightbown, David Lincoln (South-East Staffordshire)
Lilley, Rt. Hon. Peter Bruce (St. Albans)
Litherland, Robert Kenneth (Manchester, Central)
Livingstone, Kenneth Robert (Brent, East)
Livsey, Richard Arthur Lloyd (Brecon and Radnor)
Lloyd, Anthony Joseph (Stretford)
Lloyd, Sir Ian Stewart (Havant)
Lloyd, Peter Robert Cable (Fareham)
Lofthouse, Geoffrey (Pontefract and Castleford)
Lord, Michael Nicholson (Central Suffolk)
Loyden, Edward (Liverpool, Garston)
Luce, Rt. Hon. Richard Napier (Shoreham)
Lyell, Rt. Hon. Sir Nicholas Walter QC (Mid-Bedfordshire)

M

McAllion, John (Dundee, East)
McAvoy, Thomas (Glasgow, Rutherglen)
McCartney, Ian (Makerfield)
McCrea, Rev Robert Thomas William (Mid-Ulster)
McCrindle, Sir Robert Arthur (Brentwood and Ongar)
McCusker, James Harold (Upper Bann) *[died, February 1990]*
MacDonald, Calum Alastair (Western Isles)
McFall, John (Dumbarton)
Macfarlane, Sir David Neil (Sutton and Cheam)
McGrady, Edward Kevin (South Down)
MacGregor, Rt. Hon. John Roddick Russell OBE (South Norfolk)
McKay, Allen (Barnsley, West and Penistone)
MacKay, Andrew James (East Berkshire)
McKelvey, William (Kilmarnock and Loudoun)
Maclean, David John (Penrith and The Border)
McLeish, Henry Baird (Fife, Central)
Maclennan, Robert Adam Ross (Caithness and Sutherland)
McLoughlin, Patrick Allen (West Derbyshire)
MacNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick Michael Ernest David (New Forest)
McNair-Wilson, Sir Robert Michael Conal (Newbury)
McNamara, Joseph Kevin (Kingston upon Hull, North)
McTaggart, Robert (Glasgow, Central) *[died, March 1989]*
McWilliam, John David (Blaydon)
Madden, Maxwell Francis (Bradford, West)
Madel, William David (South-West Bedfordshire)
Maginnis, Kenneth (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Mahon, Mrs. Alice (Halifax)

Major, Rt. Hon. John (Huntingdon)
Malins, Humfrey Jonathan (Croydon, North-West)
Mallon, Seamus (Newry and Armagh)
Mans, Keith Douglas Rowland (Wyre)
Maples, John Cradock (Lewisham, West)
Marek, Dr. John (Wrexham)
Marland, Paul (West Gloucestershire)
Marlow, Antony Rivers (Northampton, North)
Marshall, David (Glasgow, Shettleston)
Marshall, James (Leicester, South)
Marshall, John Leslie (Hendon, South)
Marshall, Sir Robert Michael (Arundel)
Martin, David John Pattison (Portsmouth, South)
Martin, Michael John (Glasgow, Springburn)
Martlew, Eric Anthony (Carlisle)
Mates, Michael John (East Hampshire)
Maude, Francis Anthony Aylmer (North Warwickshire)
Mawhinney, Brian Stanley (Peterborough)
Maxton, John Alston (Glasgow, Cathcart)
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robert John (Tiverton)
Mayhew, Rt Hon. Sir Patrick Barnabas Burke QC (Tunbridge Wells)
Meacher, Michael Hugh (Oldham, West)
Meale, Joseph Alan (Mansfield)
Mellor, Rt. Hon. David John QC (Putney)
Meyer, Sir Anthony John Charles (Clwyd, North-West)
Michael, Alun Edward (Cardiff, South and Penarth)
Michie, Mrs. Janet Ray (Argyll and Bute)
Michie, William (Sheffield, Heeley)
Millan, Rt. Hon. Bruce (Glasgow, Govan) *[Resigned, October 1988]*
Miller, Sir Hilary Duppa (Bromsgrove)
Mills, Iain Campbell (Meriden)
Miscampbell, Norman Alexander QC (Blackpool, North)
Mitchell, Andrew John Bower (Gedling)
Mitchell, Austin Vernon (Great Grimsby)
Mitchell, Sir David Bower (North-West Hampshire)
Moate, Roger Denis (Faversham)
Molyneaux, Rt. Hon. James Henry (Lagan Valley)
Monro, Sir Hector Seymour Peter A.E. (Dumfries)
Montgomery, Sir William Fergus (Altrincham and Sale)
Moonie, Dr. Lewis George (Kirkcaldy)
Moore, Rt. Hon. John Edward Michael (Croydon, Central)
Morgan, Hywel Rhodri (Cardiff, West)
Morley, Elliot Anthony (Glanford and Scunthorpe)
Morris, Rt. Hon. Alfred (Manchester, Wythenshawe)
Morris, Rt. Hon. John QC (Aberavon)
Morris, Michael Wolfgang Laurence (Northampton, South)
Morrison, Hon. Sir Charles Andrew (Devizes)
Morrison, Rt. Hon. Peter Hugh (City of Chester)
Moss, Malcolm Douglas (North-East Cambridgeshire)
Mowlam, Ms. Marjorie (Redcar)
Moynihan, Hon. Colin Berkeley (Lewisham, East)
Mudd, William David (Falmouth and Camborne)
Mullin, Christopher John (Sunderland, South)
Murphy, Paul Peter (Torfaen)

N

Neale, Gerrard Anthony (North Cornwall)
Needham, Richard Francis (North Wiltshire)

Nellist, David John (Coventry, South East)
Nelson, Richard Anthony (Chichester)
Neubert, Michael Jon (Romford)
Newton, Rt. Hon. Antony Harold OBE (Braintree)
Nicholls, Patrick Charles Martyn (Teignbridge)
Nicholson, David John (Taunton)
Nicholson, Miss Emma Harriet (Torridge and West Devon)
Norris, Steven John (Epping Forest) *[By-election, December 1988]*

O

Oakes, Rt. Hon. Gordon James (Halton)
O'Brien, William (Normanton)
O'Hara, Edward (Knowsley, South) *[By-election, September 1990]*
O'Neill, Martin John (Clackmannan)
Onslow, Rt. Hon. Cranley Gordon Douglas (Woking)
Oppenheim, Phillip Anthony Charles Lawrence (Amber Valley)
Orme, Rt. Hon. Stanley (Salford, East)
Owen, Rt. Hon. Dr. David Anthony Llewellyn (Plymouth, Devonport)

P

Page, Richard Lewis (South-West Hertfordshire)
Paice, James Edward Thornton (Cambridge, South East)
Paisley, Rev. Ian Richard Kyle (North Antrim)
Parkinson, Rt. Hon. Cecil Edward (Hertsmere)
Parry, Robert (Liverpool, Riverside)
Patchett, Terry (Barnsley, East)
Patnick, Cyril Irvine (Sheffield, Hallam)
Patten, Rt. Hon. Christopher Francis (Bath)
Patten, Rt. Hon. John Haggitt Charles (Oxford, West and Abingdon)
Pattie, Rt. Hon. Sir Geoffrey Edwin (Chertsey and Walton)
Pawsey, James Francis (Rugby and Kenilworth)
Peacock, Mrs. Elizabeth Joan (Batley and Spen)
Pendry, Thomas (Stalybridge and Hyde)
Pike, Peter Leslie (Burnley)
Porter, David John (Waveney)
Porter, George Barrington (Wirral, South)
Portillo, Michael Denzil Xavier (Enfield, Southgate)
Powell, Raymond (Ogmore)
Powell, William Rhys (Corby)
Prescott, John Leslie (Kingston upon Hull, East)
Price, Sir David Ernest Campbell (Eastleigh)
Primarolo, Ms. Dawn (Bristol, South)

Q

Quin, Ms. Joyce Gwendolen (Gateshead, East)

R

Radice, Giles Heneage (North Durham)
Raffan, Keith William Twort (Delyn)
Raison, Rt. Hon. Timothy Hugh Francis (Aylesbury)
Randall, Stuart Jeffrey (Kingston upon Hull, West)

Alphabetical List of Members

Rathbone, John Rankin (Lewes)
Redmond, Martin (Don Valley)
Redwood, John Alan (Wokingham)
Rees, Rt. Hon. Merlyn (Morley and Leeds, South)
Reid, John (Motherwell, North)
Renton, Rt. Hon. Ronald Timothy (Mid-Sussex)
Rhodes James, Robert Vidal (Cambridge)
Rhys Williams, Sir Brandon Meredith (Kensington) *[died, May 1988]*
Richardson, Miss Josephine (Barking)
Riddick, Graham Edward Galloway (Colne Valley)
Ridley, Rt. Hon. Nicholas (Cirencester and Tewkesbury)
Ridsdale, Sir Julian Errington CBE (Harwich)
Rifkind, Rt. Hon. Malcolm Leslie QC (Edinburgh, Pentlands)
Roberts, Allan (Bootle) *[died, March 1990]*
Roberts, Sir Ieuan Wyn Pritchard (Conwy)
Robertson, George Islay Macneill (Hamilton)
Robinson, Geoffrey (Coventry, North-West)
Robinson, Peter David (Belfast, East)
Roe, Mrs. Marion Audrey (Broxbourne)
Rogers, Allan Ralph (Rhondda)
Rooker, Jeffrey William (Birmingham, Perry Barr)
Ross, Ernest (Dundee, West)
Ross, William (East Londonderry)
Rossi, Sir Hugh Alexis Louis (Hornsey and Wood Green)
Rost, Peter Lewis (Erewash)
Rowe, Andrew John Bernard (Mid-Kent)
Rowlands, Edward (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney)
Ruddock, Ms. Joan Mary (Lewisham, Deptford)
Rumbold, Mrs. Angela Claire Rosemary CBE (Mitcham and Morden)
Ryder, Richard Andrew OBE (Mid-Norfolk)

S

Sackville, Hon. Thomas Geoffrey (Bolton, West)
Sainsbury, Hon. Timothy Alan Davan (Hove)
Salmond, Alexander Elliott Anderson (Banff and Buchan)
Sayeed, Jonathan (Bristol, East)
Scott, Rt. Hon. Nicholas Paul MBE (Chelsea)
Sedgemore, Brian Charles (Hackney, South and Shoreditch)
Shaw, David Lawrence (Dover)
Shaw, Sir John Giles Dunkerley (Pudsey)
Shaw, Sir Michael Norman (Scarborough)
Sheerman, Barry John (Huddersfield)
Sheldon, Rt. Hon. Robert Edward (Ashton under Lyne)
Shelton, Sir William Jeremy Masefield (Streatham)
Shephard, Mrs. Gillian Patricia (South-West Norfolk)
Shepherd, Colin Ryley (Hereford)
Shepherd, Richard Charles Scrimgeour (Aldridge-Brownhills)
Shersby, Julian Michael (Uxbridge)
Shore, Rt. Hon. Peter David (Bethnal Green and Stepney)
Short, Clare (Birmingham, Ladywood)
Sillars, James (Glasgow, Govan) *[By-election, November 1988]*
Sims, Roger Edward (Chislehurst)
Skeet, Sir Trevor Herbert Harry (North Bedfordshire)
Skinner, Dennis Edward (Bolsover)
Smith, Andrew David (Oxford, East)
Smith, Christopher Robert, (Islington, South and Finsbury)
Smith, Sir Cyril MBE (Rochdale)
Smith, Sir Dudley Gordon (Warwick and Leamington)
Smith, Rt. Hon. John QC (Monklands, East)
Smith, John William Patrick (Vale of Glamorgan) *[By-election, May 1989]*
Smith, Timothy John (Beaconsfield)
Smyth, Rev. William Martin (Belfast, South)
Snape, Peter Charles (West Bromwich, East)
Soames, Hon. Arthur Nicholas Winston (Crawley)
Soley, Clive Stafford (Hammersmith)
Spearing, Nigel John (Newham, South)
Speed, Herbert Keith (Ashford)
Speller, Antony (North Devon)
Spicer, Sir James Wilton (West Dorset)
Spicer, William Michael Hardy (South Worcestershire)
Squire, Robin Clifford (Hornchurch)
Stanbrook, Ivor Robert (Orpington)
Stanley, Rt. Hon. Sir John Paul (Tonbridge and Malling)
Steel, Rt. Hon. Sir David Martin Scott (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
Steen, Anthony David (South Hams)
Steinberg, Gerald Neil (City of Durham)
Stern, Michael Charles (Bristol, North-West)
Stevens, Lewis David MBE (Nuneaton)
Stewart, Andrew Struthers (Sherwood)
Stewart, Rt. Hon. Bernard Harold Ian Halley RD (North Hertfordshire)
Stewart, John Allan (Eastwood)
Stokes, Sir John Heydon Romaine (Halesowen and Stourbridge)
Stott, Roger CBE (Wigan)
Stradling Thomas, Sir John (Monmouth)
Strang, Gavin Steel (Edinburgh, East)
Straw, John Whitaker (Blackburn)
Sumberg, David Anthony Gerald (Bury, South)
Summerson, Hugo Hawksley Fitzthomas (Walthamstow)

T

Tapsell, Sir Peter Hannay Bailey (East Lindsey)
Taylor, Edward Macmillan (Southend, East)
Taylor, Ian Colin, MBE (Esher)
Taylor, Rt. Hon. John David (Strangford)
Taylor, John Mark (Solihull)
Taylor, Matthew Owen John (Truro)
Taylor, Mrs. Winifred Ann (Dewsbury)
Tebbit, Rt. Hon. Norman Beresford (Chingford)
Temple-Morris, Peter (Leominster)
Thatcher, Rt. Hon. Mrs. Margaret Hilda (Finchley)
Thomas, Dafydd Elis (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy)
Thompson, Donald (Calder Valley)
Thompson, Hugh Patrick (Norwich, North)
Thompson, John (Wansbeck)
Thorne, Neil Gordon OBE TD (Ilford, South)
Thornton, George Malcolm (Crosby)
Thurnham, Peter Giles (Bolton, North-East)
Townend, John Ernest (Bridlington)
Townsend, Cyril David (Bexleyheath)
Tracy, Richard Patrick (Surbiton)
Tredinnick, David Arthur Stephen (Bosworth)
Trimble, David (Upper Bann) *[By-election, May 1990]*
Trippier, David Austin RD (Rossendale and Darwen)
Trotter, Neville Guthrie (Tynemouth)
Twinn, Ian David (Edmonton)
Turner, Dennis (Wolverhampton, South-East)

V

Vaughan, Sir Gerard Folliott (Reading, East)
Vaz, Nigel Keith Anthony Standish (Leicester, East)
Viggers, Peter John (Gosport)

W

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THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 25 JUNE 1987]

THIRTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 180**

FIRST VOLUME OF SESSION 1990-91

House of Commons

Wednesday 7 November 1990

The House met at twenty-nine minutes past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Message to attend Her Majesty:

The House went; and having returned:

The Sitting was suspended until half-past Two o'clock, and then resumed.

SESSIONAL ORDERS

ELECTIONS

Ordered,

That all Members who are returned for two or more places in any part of the United Kingdom to make their Election for which of the places they will serve, within one week after it shall appear that there is no question upon the Return for that place; and if anything shall come in question touching the the Return or Election of any Member, he is to withdraw during the time the matter is in debate; and that all Members returned upon double Returns do withdraw till their Returns are determined.

Resolved,

That no Peer of the Realm, except a Peer of Ireland, hath any right to give his vote in the Election of any Member to serve in Parliament.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been elected or returned a Member of this House, or endeavoured so to be, by Bribery or any other corrupt practices, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against all such persons as shall have been wilfully concerned in such Bribery or other corrupt practices.

WITNESSES

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath been tampering with any Witness, in respect of his evidence to be given to this House, or any Committee thereof, or directly or indirectly hath endeavoured to deter or hinder any person from appearing or giving evidence the same is declared to be a high crime and misdemeanour; and this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person hath given false evidence in any case before this House, or any Committee thereof, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

Metropolitan Police

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Commissioner of the Police of the Metropolis do take care that during the Session of Parliament the passages through the streets leading to this House be kept free and open and that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Members to and from this House, and that no disorder be allowed in Westminster Hall, or in the passages leading to this House, during the Sitting of Parliament, and that there be no annoyance therein or thereabouts; and that the Serjeant at Arms attending this House do communicate this Order to the Commissioner aforesaid.

2.33 pm

Mr. Robert Adley (Christchurch): I shall be very brief, Mr. Speaker. You will remember that in 1970 the late Mr. Marcus Lipton referred to the growing ineffectiveness of this Sessional Order. Twenty years later, traffic has hardly diminished in and around Parliament square. Parked coaches especially cause traffic jams at every entrance to the square. Could you, Mr. Speaker, please use your good offices to see that these tower blocks on wheels are banned from parking within one mile of this place?

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): I am pleased that Parliament is not allowing the Sessional Orders to go through on the nod. Some people were unkind enough to suggest that on the last occasion when I raised this issue, it was because of the television cameras—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh no."] I agree with you, Mr. Speaker, that that would be a scandalous interpretation.

I wish to draw attention to the all-party notices of 18 October 1990. On the occasion of the visit by the President of the Italian republic on Tuesday 23 October, the Sessional Orders relating to access to this place were not repeated. The all-party notices state:

[Mr. Bob Cryer]

"These closures will take effect at 11.15 am and the roads will be re-opened at approximately 1.30 pm. Provided they identify themselves to the Police, members of Parliament proceeding to or from the Palace of Westminster or the Parliamentary outbuildings (whether on foot or in motor vehicles) may pass along the streets which have been closed until the latest possible moment."

The Sessional Orders are unqualified. There is no "until the latest possible moment." Access is unqualified. I know that we have to be courteous of the President of the Italian republic, but that does not mean to say that, because we are in the Common Market, the rules of the House should be subordinated, swept to one side or qualified to say that, in effect, at some stage the Commissioner of Police may deny entry to the House by road because of the visit of the President of the Italian republic. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I ask you to ensure that that sort of qualification is not introduced again.

One last point on the Sessional Orders is that on the last occasion when I raised the matter of students gaining access to this place, a number of them wrote to me and said that it was right that citizens should have access, in addition to hon. Members, because they are the people who will guide our destiny in future.

Mr. Speaker: I will ensure that all those points are made known to the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Question put and agreed to.

Votes and Proceedings

Ordered,

That the Votes and Proceedings of this House be printed, being first perused by Mr. Speaker; and that he do appoint the printing thereof; and that no person but such as he shall appoint do presume to print the same.

Outlawries

A Bill for the more effectual preventing Clandestine Outlawries; read the First time; to be read a Second time.

Journal

Ordered,

That the Journal of this House, from the end of the last Session to the end of the present Session, with an index thereto, be printed.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by the appointment and under the direction of Sir Clifford John Boulton, KCB, the Clerk of this House.

Ordered,

That the said Journal and Index be printed by such person as shall be licensed by Mr. Speaker, and that no other person do presume to print the same.

Queen's Speech

Mr. Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that this House has this day attended Her Majesty in the House of Peers, and that Her Majesty was pleased to make a Most Gracious Speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy.

I shall direct that the terms of the Gracious Speech be printed in the Votes and Proceedings. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I look forward to visiting the United States of America in May and being present on the occasion of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Zimbabwe next Autumn.

My Government attach the highest priority to national security, and to the preservation of international peace with freedom and justice. They will give full support to NATO as the basis for collective Western defence, and will maintain adequate and effective nuclear and conventional forces. They will play a full part in adapting NATO strategy and will take forward work on restructuring our forces to reflect the welcome changes in Europe and threats to peace in other parts of the world.

My Government will work for balanced and verifiable measures of arms control. They welcome the prospect of an agreement on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe and will be active in further negotiations on this, and in the multilateral negotiations in Geneva on the abolition of chemical weapons.

My Government will continue to uphold the purposes and principles of the United Nations. My Government will work with the utmost determination, together with our Allies and the whole international community, for the unconditional implementation of the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council which require the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait, and the restoration of the independence and legitimate government of Kuwait. My Government will maintain their efforts to secure the release of all Britons held hostage or detained in Kuwait, Iraq, Lebanon, and elsewhere in the Middle East. My Government will continue to work for long-term peace in the Middle East including a settlement of the Palestinian problem.

My Government will host the next Economic Summit in London in July.

My Government will work to strengthen still further the good relations between the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, and to buttress the new democracies in Eastern Europe. They will play an active part in the Paris meeting of Heads of State and Government of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

My Government welcome the unification of Germany and look forward to working closely with the Government of the United Germany.

My Government will continue to work with our Community partners to complete the Single Market; to reinforce budgetary discipline; to continue reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and to bring about a successful conclusion to the Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations. They will contribute constructively to the inter-governmental conferences on Economic and Monetary

Union and Community institutions beginning in December. They welcome the new European Bank for Reconstruction and Development to London.

My Government will promote further international co-operation on environmental issues.

My Government will maintain a substantial aid programme aimed at promoting sustainable economic and social progress and good government in developing countries.

My Government will continue their policy of encouragement to all sides in South Africa to enter negotiations to create through peaceful means a democratic non-racial society.

My Government will work vigorously to fulfil their responsibilities for Hong Kong, building on the Sino-British Joint Declaration. They will honour their commitments to the people of the Falkland Islands.

My Government will continue to play a full part in the Commonwealth.

My Government will maintain their fight against terrorism in the United Kingdom and overseas.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the Public Service will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government will maintain firm financial policies, strengthened by the Exchange Rate Mechanism, designed to reduce inflation and foster the conditions necessary for sustained growth. They will continue to promote enterprise and improve the working of the economy.

They will maintain firm control of public expenditure with the aim of keeping its share of national income on a downward trend.

A Bill will be introduced to facilitate contractor operation of the Atomic Weapons Establishment. Legislation will be introduced to provide for the sale of the Insurance Services business of the Export Credits Guarantee Department.

My Government will promote improved efficiency and safety in transport. Legislation will be introduced to encourage privately financed roads; to reform procedures for streetworks; to improve road traffic; to convert trust ports into private companies; and to provide for a second Severn crossing.

Legislation will be introduced to improve arrangements for compensation for compulsory purchase of land and buildings and to make the town and country planning system more efficient.

My Government will continue to work for the regeneration of our cities.

My Government will vigorously pursue their policies in fighting crime. A Bill will be brought forward for England and Wales to deal with sentencing of offenders and to strengthen the parole system.

My Government will work vigorously to combat the trafficking and misuse of drugs nationally and internationally.

My Government are concerned to strengthen parental responsibility for children. Measures will be introduced to improve the assessment, collection and enforcement of maintenance.

A Bill will again be brought before you to give our courts the jurisdiction to try alleged war criminals.

My Government will continue to take action to improve quality in education. A Bill will be introduced to establish new machinery for negotiating the pay and conditions of school teachers in England and Wales.

My Government will continue to work to improve the quality of Health and Social Services.

In Northern Ireland, My Government will be resolute in their efforts to defeat terrorism: a Bill will be introduced to replace existing anti-terrorism legislation. They will sustain their efforts to secure political progress, to strengthen the economy and to promote mutual respect and trust throughout the community. They will maintain positive relations with the Republic of Ireland.

For Scotland, a Bill will be introduced to create a Natural Heritage Agency to achieve an integrated approach to conservation and countryside matters.

Legislation will be introduced to provide new benefits for disabled people.

Other measures will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Debate on the Address

[FIRST DAY]

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the proposer and the seconder of the motion on the Loyal Address, it may be for the convenience of the House if I inform the House that the proposed subjects for debate for the rest of this week and for next week are as follows: Thursday 8 November —foreign affairs and defence; Friday 9 November—industry and transport; Monday 12 November—rights, freedoms and responsibilities; Tuesday 13 November—education and training; Wednesday 14 November—the economy.

2.38 pm

Mr. George Younger (Ayr): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

It is a special honour, which I greatly appreciate, to be invited to propose this motion, but I must start this year on a note of sadness. No one who was present on this occasion last year will ever forget the brilliant and amusing way in which this speech was made by Ian Gow. I know that I speak for the whole House when I say that we miss him, particularly today, but we are happy to recall many memories of serving in this House with such a delightful and courageous friend.

It is to the constituency of Ayr that the honour today surely belongs and I feel greatly privileged to have represented Ayr in the House for 26 years. My predecessor was Sir Thomas Moore who represented Ayr for nearly 40 years with distinction and skill. It also happens, by coincidence, that before him Ayr was represented from 1906 to 1922 by my great grandfather Sir George Younger who rose to be Chief Whip in the coalition Government of the first world war and later to chairman of the Conservative party.

There were still some constituents who remembered my great grandfather when I was elected in 1964 and I am indebted to one of them for an insight into his debating style which the House may feel seems to have been somewhat more robust than mine. He was apparently addressing a large meeting in Ayr town hall at a time when there was much agitation about the big social issue of that day which was whether a man should be allowed to marry his deceased wife's sister. Those who are familiar with "Iolanthe" will recall mention of this issue by the Fairy Queen. My great grandfather, however, was speaking about imperial preference and a heckler continually shouted out, "What about marriage with deceased wife's sister?" Eventually my great grandfather silenced him by responding, "Sir, if elected, I will make it compulsory."

In its origins, the Ayr constituency goes back to the formation of the Scottish parliamentary seats after the Treaty of Union in 1707. There were county seats and borough seats and the constituency was entitled Ayr Burghs until it was officially changed to Ayr 20 years ago. The composition of the constituency has changed in detail many times over the years, but has always been based on the two seaside towns of Ayr and Prestwick. Troon has been excluded at times, but is now firmly back in the constituency, giving a perfect excuse for the Member to attend the Open golf championship as a matter of duty.

The constituency measures about 10 miles by seven, but in terms of numbers of electors it is the biggest constituency in Scotland. I am sure that I shall not be accused of natural bias if I add that by any standard it is in a most attractive setting, looking across the Firth of Clyde to the island of Arran and the Mull of Kintyre, although they are not part of the constituency. Many historical events have taken place in or around Ayr. It has been a royal borough since 1204 and the earliest reference to Prestwick goes back to 1174, but, as those dates are a source of perennial dispute, I will be wise to pass on quickly. The history of the area is so long and varied that I can do no justice to it in the time available today.

Ayr is best known the world over as the birthplace of Robert Burns, Scotland's national bard and one of the great masters of the English language in literary history. Therefore, I have the task of representing Robert Burns in this House which is not quite as much a sinecure office as it sounds. There is the duty of attending innumerable Burns suppers every January. That is usually most enjoyable, although some years ago I endured one such supper which lasted five hours during which the only refreshment offered was orange juice. It was a challenge which I would not willingly repeat.

The duties do not end there. I have a constituent who believes that she is in regular touch with Robert Burns and he is, thus, able to raise matters with me from time to time. It may interest the House to know that Robert Burns is opposed to capital punishment and also, rather more surprisingly, to the televising of Parliament. I am glad to be able to add that I had a telephone call from my constituent last week to say that Robert Burns is now much less unhappy than he was about the community charge. My constituent added that she has now got her rebate fully paid.

I am glad to say that the economy of Ayr is better today than it has been at any time in the past 25 years. Unemployment, as elsewhere in Scotland, has fallen steadily and we have more people in work than we have ever had. We have many small businesses in the tourist and service industries, as Ayr is the major market town in the area with excellent shopping facilities. Tourism is particularly important because of the worldwide attraction of the Burns country, although we wish that the Scottish tourist board would encourage us to market the Burns country everywhere as the unique product that it is.

In Ayr we also have one of the finest racecourses in Britain where many classic races such as the Scottish grand national and the Ayr gold cup are run. Incidentally, its whole future was put in doubt by the effect of the old rating system under which Ayr paid more than twice the rates paid by Ascot. The reform of that system in recent years has been crucial in securing the future of the Ayr races. I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland for all that he has done in that regard.

We have a considerable amount of manufacturing industry in the constituency. In aviation we have Caledonian Airmotive, a highly successful company which refurbishes General Electric aero engines and exports to

Europe and America. It is now expanding its markets to the far east. Last year it was given a Queen's award for exports.

Our biggest industry in the constituency is British Aerospace, which now makes the enormously successful Jetstream 31 commuter aircraft. It exports strongly all over the United States of America. The orders and options currently stand at more than 400 aircraft, 306 of which have already been delivered and 51 will be delivered this year. Jetstream is the world leader for regional commuter aircraft with 50 per cent. of the market and there are now real hopes of progress in the far east market as well. Next year we look forward to the launch of the next aircraft, the Jetstream 41. That will be a highly significant Scottish event, as it will be the first aircraft to be entirely designed and built in Scotland since the 1950s.

That brings me to the most important and most difficult issue that we face—the future of Prestwick airport. That hangs in the balance since the decision of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to allow Prestwick's transatlantic traffic to go to other airports. Most of it has now done so, leaving the best airport in western Europe from an environmental point of view without any significant passenger traffic. I and most of my constituents disagreed strongly with that decision, but we have accepted it, however reluctantly. What we now ask for is positive help from the Government in attracting new traffic by negotiating "fifth freedom" rights where possible and leaning on British airports to allow Prestwick to compete effectively for the new traffic it needs. When air space is increasingly at a premium everywhere it would be foolish indeed not to make use of an asset such as Prestwick airport.

Hon. Members who spend long hours in Committees upstairs may like to know that the fine textile coverings for the chairs on which they sit are made by British Replin, a firm in Ayr. If Committee work should ever become too heated in the forthcoming Session, it might be of some comfort to the more sensitive among us to know that British Replin won a Queen's award this year for producing special flameproof safety fabrics for aircraft.

I am glad to tell the House that in Ayr we feel that our businesses and industries are doing well and that we can look to the future with confidence. In these difficult economic times, it is a welcome change from the past to note that the Scottish economy is at present performing very well. After all the scare talk about the alleged destruction of manufacturing industry, it is remarkable that manufacturing output in Scotland is higher than it has ever been and much of it is in new, high-technology industries, which bring not only jobs but technology for the future.

There are more Scots in employment than ever before. I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on the continuing fall in Scottish unemployment. I hope that he will use his newly gained power over industrial training to ensure that maximum training is concentrated on the long-term unemployed, of whom there are still far too many.

I welcome the measures so clearly outlined in the Gracious Speech. They build on the long series of radical reforms that have been put through by Governments led by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. As a constituency Member, I particularly welcome the proposed Bill to enforce the payment of maintenance by fathers for their children. It has long been a scandal how some fathers have been able to avoid responsibility for their own children.

I also welcome the references in the speech to our role in the European Community. As a long-standing supporter of our full membership, I agree that we have a vital and constructive role to play in improving the way forward to the single market and other reforms. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is to be congratulated on devising the only credible scheme there is for progress on stage 2 of the Delors plan. He and my right hon. Friends are absolutely right to sign up only to what they can see and evaluate. I do not believe that the House will support major measures that are not fully spelt out. If my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government continue to follow that course, they can count on my full support.

The Queen's Speech is different from its predecessors in that it reflects the traumatic world events in which we are involved. The freeing of most of eastern Europe and the collapse of the Warsaw pact have lifted the main threat to peace that we confronted for 40 years. We all hope that eventually it will enable us to spend less on defending ourselves, but I am sure that we can rely on my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Defence to keep a modern and balanced defence capability through NATO. I include in that the essential need to make some provision to deal with the unexpected. Throughout history it has always been the unexpected that is most likely to happen.

That is exactly what we now face in the middle east. Suddenly, we are confronted with a new, ruthless source of cruelty and injustice which no decent person can ignore or condone. It is important that there has been such unanimity on both sides of the House in the face of that wickedness and the inhuman treatment of our hostages. It has been a great achievement of leadership by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, President Bush and all the diplomats involved that the United Nations has been brought together to take such a strong stand.

As to what happens next, the whole House will profoundly hope that a solution can be reached without further bloodshed. But, as the House is aware, the United Nations Security Council has made quite clear what it insists must be done. It will be our duty to do all we can to play our part, however hard it may be, in fulfilling the resolutions that have been passed.

The House may face difficult decisions during the year that lies ahead. We do our work with the whole nation watching us and they will expect us to be true to our history of opposing cruelty and injustice wherever and whenever we find it. The Gracious Speech gives us a clear lead, and I offer my full support to my right hon. Friend and the Government in whatever lies ahead.

2.54 pm

Mr. Jeremy Hanley (Richmond and Barnes): It is a great honour to second the motion and to follow the excellent and eloquent speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger). I should like to make it clear to the House that I have already written to my constituency chairman to say so. I am thrilled to say that I have not yet received a reply.

All right hon. and hon. Members know of a well-known booklet—the infamous "MPs' Chart", published by

[Mr. Jeremy Hanley]

Andrew Roth. Some Members may cringe when they recall their own potted biographies, perhaps regretting some peccadillo from their youth which is recreated every Parliament for publication; but what would one give for the description of my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr in that booklet? In what is an independent assessment he is described as

"tactful; charming; warm; loyal; cheerful".

I would willingly kill for such a description in Roth—but Mr. Roth has my right hon. Friend bang to rights. I am pleased to take this opportunity to thank my right hon. Friend for his friendship over the years and his always excellent advice and guidance.

My entry in Roth begins with the words "beautiful, affluent, but noisy". I hope that hon. Members will have realised that that describes my constituency, not me. My constituents are very conscious of the deep honour that they have received because of my being allowed to second the Loyal Address.

Richmond is a most pleasant part of the capital city. It forms the eastern half of the London borough of Richmond upon Thames, where we are proud to say that the countryside comes to town. I have great pleasure in sharing parliamentary representation of the borough with my hon. and musical Friend the Member for Twickenham (Mr. Jessel), who is truly a legendary local champion. Who could not be thrilled to represent a constituency that contains the incomparable beauty of Richmond park, the charm and importance of the royal botanic gardens in Kew and almost 12 miles of the River Thames?

This historic place, this birthplace of kings and queens, was represented—with longevity—for the 50 years before me by only two Members of Parliament: Brigadier Sir George Harvie-Watt and the then Anthony Royle, now my noble Friend Lord Fanshawe. When I was first elected I received a letter from George Harvie-Watt out of the blue. It came from his home in Fife; he was then in his late 80s. He was one of those often unsung heroes who occupy the position of parliamentary private secretary to a Prime Minister—in his case Sir Winston Churchill. In return, I rang him up, and he gave me some golden advice. He said, "If ever you cannae think of a thing to say at the annual general meeting of the Richmond division, play the bagpipes. It allus works for me!" I very much regret that I have never yet taken him up on that advice, but I wonder what advice he would have given me on this occasion——

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): Play the bagpipes.

Mr. Hanley: Perhaps the mighty wurlitzer would have been more appropriate.

Having been elected in 1983 in a somewhat surprising way with a less than generous majority of 74, I found my first day at Westminster—as I am sure all hon. Members found theirs—a day that I could never forget. With a majority that small, who is to say what tipped the balance? I have to admit, however, that the day before the election there was a showing on television of my father's film, "The Blue Lamp". It was the archetypal bobby-on-the-beat type of movie and, who knows, perhaps it helped. But when I went through St. Stephen's entrance on my first day to take the oath the policeman on the door said, "Mr. Hanley, I am very sorry that your late father is not around to see you come into the House. He would have been very proud, sir." I said, "Thank you sergeant, that is kind of you." He added, "Mind you, sir, I think the shock might have killed him." I am sure that hon. Members have noted the smiles that play on the faces of the constabulary in the Palace of Westminster. Could it be the confidence of a job well done or, more likely, that whatever the result of the next election they will be back?

On that day I learned one of the most important lessons about the House. I sat in the Chamber waiting to take the oath and watched from a modest spot near the back on the Government side as the famous and the lesser known filed past. It was like viewing a walking waxworks or, as one of my constituents said, "It is just like Madame Tussauds except that the exhibits look slightly less lifelike." I sat on the fourth row back and was conscious of somebody sitting down next to me. I turned round and saw that it was the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley). Startled, I said, "How do you do? I did not realise that you were on our side." My hon. and reverend neighbour said in his unmistakable tones, "Never confuse sitting on your side with being on your side." Hon. Members will agree that that phrase sounds strangely pertinent even today.

One of the welcome experiences of this place that is little known to those outside is that whatever our political differences we respect and even admire many of our foes—that is, as long as they are not in our own party. In researching the last 12 years of *Hansard* before undertaking this august task, I noticed that one of the regular features of the proposing or seconding of the Loyal Address was the intervention of the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer). The House will understand when I say that I would willingly have welcomed an intervention from that source today. I know that we all wish him well. I should also like to pay tribute to Ian Gow whose speech last year was a model of perfection. I wish that I had one ounce of his dedication, his courage or his ability.

The Gracious Speech contains some important measures. My constituents are keenly aware of the responsibility that we all bear to future generations for the preservation of our planet and believe that personal example is vital. The buck stops at home. I congratulate all those in Richmond and Barnes who give of their time and effort to try to repair the damage caused carelessly, often stupidly, and always anti-socially by others. Richmond has won the national Tidy Britain award twice in the past five years and was in the final the past two years.

Richmond people care passionately about their environment and the planning Bill outlined in the Gracious Speech will be of great interest to them. While we recognise the need for smaller housing units as the pattern of family life changes, insensitive building and demolition can ruin our harmonious street scenes. Halting pollution is more than merely a matter of picking up litter or turning to less harmful substances. Richmond and Barnes suffer pollution from aircraft noise. While we welcome the Government's action in recent years to reduce the number of night flights and to phase out noisier aircraft engines, more needs to be done.

We also believe in more efficient public transport. We are grateful for the investment in London Regional Transport and for the new routes that have been planned and we look forward to ways of speeding up travel around the capital, especially on buses, so that they will attract even more passengers. It is a crime that 80 per cent. of all

cars that cross Kew bridge have only one person in them. Therefore, we look forward to further progress towards an integrated system of public transport for the south-east.

We also look forward to further progress in adopting the remaining few European directives to achieve the single market and we recognise that Britain is first in the list of nations achieving their responsibilities. I am a convinced European and I have the dreams and hopes of those who would see an even more united Europe. However, I commend to the House and my constituents the responsible and realistic policy of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her Ministers, who do not sign away Britain's sovereignty and interests on hopes and dreams alone, but base their decisions on solid achievement when the difficulties are conquered and the barriers to success overcome.

My constituents, who have long enjoyed the sight of herds of deer in Richmond park, are keen to protect further the wildlife of our country and to eradicate cruelty to living things wherever in the world it occurs. We are thrilled that salmon have now returned to Teddington lock, although there was slight disappointment when the first one that was caught by an angler, who claimed the substantial prize on offer, proved on closer inspection to have all the characteristics of having come from the deep freeze at Tesco. Since then, genuine salmon have been swimming up the cleaner Thames.

My first parliamentary initiative was to have anglers' lead weights banned, as they did so much harm to the swans that used to be a common sight on the Thames. I am pleased to say that swans are there again. I thank my right hon. Friend the recently appointed Secretary of State for Health, who, when a Minister in the Department of the Environment, was instrumental in that ban and in beginning the essential task of greening the Commons. I offer my heartiest congratulations to him on his elevation, and to all those who sit in this Chamber in their new guises, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough and Horncastle (Mr. Leigh), the newest Minister, who represented Richmond in the late, unlamented GLC.

My constituents will also welcome in the Queen's Speech a strengthening of the parole system, particularly if it leads to fewer people in our prisons. They will welcome the promised action on the improved quality in education and new benefits for disabled people. They will also welcome the continuing commitment to improve the quality of the national health service.

I am grateful for this opportunity to second the Loyal Address and welcome the Queen's Speech. However, I am conscious of my mortality, in that seven of the last 13 seconders have failed to return to Westminster in the general election after their contribution. I would far rather suffer the longevity of my other predecessors. In spite of Labour Members, I should love to come back time and again because I can think of no more worthy, important or fulfilling task than to serve my constituents in this hallowed House.

3.8 pm

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): I follow the happy convention of the House by congratulating both the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) and the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on two fine speeches in proposing and seconding the Loyal Address. I associate myself with what the right hon. Member for Ayr said about the late lamented Ian Gow. I cannot speak on this occasion without recalling, as I probably shall on many future occasions, on both sides of the House, that Ian spoke in this debate last year. I am certain that no hon. Member could fail to remember his speech with both affection and respect. We continue to miss him greatly.

The right hon. Member for Ayr and the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes may believe that they were selected by the Prime Minister and the Government Whips, or whatever machinery is currently in use, for the honour that they have discharged with considerable merit because of their wit and standing in the House or their more general distinction. I suppose that they would be right on all three grounds. I can tell them, however, the real reason why they were selected.

Having read everything that has ever been written about both the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Gentleman, I discover that they have extraordinary records. They are without blemish, without eccentricity and without one instance of rebellion. I am sure that they were chosen just to make my job difficult. I hope sincerely that whoever chose them for that reason will not succeed. However, the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Gentleman are model Members. Whoever was responsible for their selection may have realised with particular prescience that, on this day in this week, above all weeks, the Conservative party would need models of conformity to address the House, Members who could be held up to all others as examples of how hon. Members should conduct themselves.

The right hon. Member for Ayr, who has a distinguished record, has not only been Secretary of State for Scotland and Secretary of State for Defence. Perhaps his most glorious moment came last year when he was a campaign manager, when the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) ran, if that is the operative term, against the Prime Minister. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman would describe that as a demanding task. It may be that, after recent tumultuous days he is already out of a job, as the task may not have to be undertaken this year. I am sure, however, that if the job has to be done, the right hon. Gentleman would discharge it with great loyalty.

The right hon. Member for Ayr has a long and distinguished record of loyalty. He is the man who in 1963 stood down from his seat so that Lord Home of the Hirsel could represent a constituency in the House of Commons. Last year, the right hon. Gentleman stood up for the Prime Minister in order to be her election agent. I admire that. I am entirely in favour of such loyalty to leaders.

The dissident past of the right hon. Member for Ayr is rather more chequered. It is said that at Oxford university he joined all the political parties, including the Communist society. I hope that the Prime Minister was not listening to that. If the right hon. Gentleman finds himself in any difficulty about that, he should describe himself as a crypto-Communist. That will not do him any harm at all.

Like the right hon. Member for Ayr, I am fortunate in having a constituent with literary connections. The two figures who are fortunate in communicating with her are Dylan Thomas and St. Paul. Perhaps we could get the right hon. Gentleman's constituent and mine together so that they could have a sort of posthumous literary

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function. I should think that it would be an interesting lunch, especially with Robert Burns and Dylan Thomas in attendance, with St. Paul looking after them.

Mention of Robert Burns reminded me of what I consider may be an apposite verse on this occasion which was Robert Burns's "To a Louse." It might be subtitled a homily to warn would-be contenders to leadership of political parties:

"O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us
To see oursels as others see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,
And foolish notion."

I am not accepting any invitation to Burns night, before the right hon. Member for Ayr runs away with that idea.

The hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes was a complete delight. I am sure that everyone would agree with that. The hon. Gentleman has certain advantages. He is the son of distinguished actors, both of whom rightly command admiration. He gave evidence of that in recounting his encounter with the hon. Member for Antrim, North (Rev. Ian Paisley). I had a not dissimilar encounter when I shared an office with the hon. Member for Antrim, North in those halcyon days when members of different parties shared offices, and they did not come any more mixed than the hon. Gentleman. On one occasion, he caught me doing a rather bad impersonation of his accent. He said that I was not to worry about that, because impersonation was the sincerest form of flattery. However, he added, "Not that I believe in flattery of course."

A biography describes the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes as

"An attractive giant who can display two faces."

It is a strange aspect of politics, but I think that that description was intended as a compliment. We were delighted by the hon. Gentleman. He has been described by a grandmaster as the best chess player in the House of Commons, so he is obviously a man not only of theatrical and political talent, but of patience and planning. After his remarkable speech, I can say only that his contract is definitely in the post.

The Queen's Speech contains measures that the Opposition are likely to support. Proposals such as those intended to combat rising crime and trafficking in drugs, to improve the collection of maintenance for children, and to provide new benefits for the disabled will naturally receive our constructive attention. We shall continue to support the United Nations policy for securing a complete and unconditional Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait; nothing else will do. That must remain the absolute precondition of any progress in any form of any negotiations.

Naturally, the more widely preferred method of fulfilling the United Nations policy is by peaceful means. That is why there is such a strong case for prolonged and sustained sanctions, backed by military deployment, to maintain pressure on Saddam Hussein until he complies fully with international law and United Nations policy. Meanwhile, the Iraqi dictator is playing a callous game with hostages and their families. Everyone is rightly pleased when any hostages are released, but no one can give credence to Saddam Hussein's claim that he is acting out of compassion in permitting such releases. The only way in which that claim can gain any validity is if he replaces his invitations to relatives to visit hostages with the immediate freeing of those hostages.

Those who are held and those who care for them are desperate for release, or even for respite, from their anxiety. They know, as well as anyone in this House knows, what Saddam Hussein is up to. They know that if they visit Iraq they will risk injury and exploitation. All that is clear but, frankly, if anguished people go to Iraq to see their loved ones in such circumstances, I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that we should treat them with understanding and compassion, not condemnation. They are in a terrible position.

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): I agree with my right hon. Friend. Will he take this opportunity to tell the House his views on the outrageous statement last Monday by the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes) that the families of hostages should "stop mewling and puking"?

Mr. Kinnock: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. In common with many other people, when I heard about the remarks made by the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes)—who is in the Chamber—I felt abomination. I reflected further and recalled the origin of the lines

"mewling and puking in the nurse's arms."

I thought it apposite that I should recall the final lines of that play, which I studied for O-level. The hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge may recall that the quote concluded something like this:

"Last scene of all . . .
second childishness and mere oblivion;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste"—

and, I would add, "sans common decency and common humanity"—

"sans everything."—

[Interruption.]

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: As we consider the Queen's Speech, we are bound to reflect on the condition of the Government who produced it. After all, it is only a year since we were told that the Government had

"The Right Team for the Future".

Since then, no fewer than five members have left the Cabinet team. Some went—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Kinnock: It is deliberate, Mr. Speaker.

Some left that Government team because of family commitments; one left because he had effectively banned himself from playing in Europe; and then, last Thursday, the most recent departure came because of what I think we could call the recurrence of old injuries—as far as I could see, they were back injuries. Over the years, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) has had a great deal to put up with. However, in the end he could no longer take what the Prime Minister had to offer. As the Prime Minister discovered, he was, after all, too big a man to endure any more of her disloyalty to him and her contempt for his convictions.

To the credit of the right hon. and learned Gentleman, he took his letter to the Prime Minister privately, and he announced his decision to her face to face, as one would expect from a man whom we recognise to be a man of honour. That is not everyone's way, of course. Although I oppose the Prime Minister, I must say that I feel contempt for those who have fawned on her and even

personally been favoured by her, but who now anonymously attack her. Those who snipe at the Prime Minister publicly, but then cast around for surrogates or stalking horses deserve much the same disdain, especially when they write voluminous letters of criticism and then go off to the middle east to see the Palestinians and the Israelis—but, apparently, not to speak to any interviewers. We have a latter-day Samson Agonistes—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will not have hon. Members pointing at me like that. Let us proceed in good order.

Mr. Kinnock: There is an unusual silence from a particular quarter. As I said, we have a latter-day Samson Agonistes—speechless in Gaza. Such people deserve what they get. I think that the current term is that they are being flushed; there never was a more apt use of the term.

The divisions in the Government in part explain their conduct this afternoon. They are divided right down the middle. I suppose that there is a kind of poetic justice in that, after all the great divisions that they have inflicted on our country in their 11 years in power. Yet, despite all the increased division that they have brought to our country, we could still hear the Prime Minister, at her conference a few weeks ago, proclaiming that she wanted to see "an open, classless Britain"; an opportunity society. It is a completely desirable objective, of course. Indeed, I so much agree with it that I could have applauded the Prime Minister myself had I not known that she had spent the past 11 years taking Britain in exactly the opposite direction, away from the open, classless society.

When families are crushed by mortgage payments, when housing waiting lists are endless, when the cardboard cities are growing, how can the Prime Minister talk of an open, classless society? In a Britain in which family and pensioner poverty has grown wider and deeper over all these years, this certainly is not a country that is being made classless. In fact, an underclass is being created.

Does an open, classless society require a poll tax that levies the same on a shop assistant as on a stockbroker? Does the unified business rate which closes businesses and crushes enterprise produce an opportunity society?

How does the Prime Minister think that she is building an opportunity society when child care provision is abysmal, when primary and secondary school classes have no teachers, when so few children over the age of 16 are staying in regular education, when higher education students are forced to live on loans, and there are universities threatened with bankruptcy? What kind of opportunity society is that?

How open can a society be when there are closures again this winter of hospital beds and hospital wards, when, due to the Government's so-called reforms, more than 4,000 beds are being taken out in order to try to balance the books? How classless is a society that has a record 1 million people on hospital waiting lists—unless, of course, they can pay for treatment?

If the Prime Minister truly wants to see what she spoke about at her conference—an open, classless Britain—why did the Government again this year refuse to restore the true value of child benefit? Any Prime Minister who truly wanted to promote a classless society would have taken the opportunity this year fully to implement community care, but the Prime Minister did not do so. She absolutely postponed it indefinitely. In the process, the Prime Minister condemned millions of her fellow citizens, including some of the most frail and needy and those who care for them, to continued isolation and poverty, without care, without proper support and even without respite.

Now, from the Prime Minister who speaks of wanting —*[Interruption]*—a classless and opportunity society when her main instrument of economic policy—*[Interruption.]* I am glad that the House is on television. The public can see just how yobbish the Conservative party is.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House knows that here we listen to the arguments, and I ask those on the Government Benches to do just that.

Mr. Kinnock: I was asking the Prime Minister how—I hope that she will reply when she comes to speak; she is speaking today, unlike on a previous occasion—she can even speak of wanting a classless, opportunity society when her main instrument of economic management over 11 years has been unemployment, and when once again she has resorted to policies that have brought recession? That recession is, of course, no accident. We have it from the Prime Minister herself that, in her own words, there are "uncontestable signs" that "the economy is working" in the way that the Government "wanted it to". Bankrupt companies, closed factories, reduced investment, rising unemployment are all signs of the success of policy to the Prime Minister. To us, they are evidence of gross incompetence and total failure and that view is shared by millions throughout Britain.

This recession, like all recessions, will eventually come to an end; it will taper off at some time. But it will leave behind weakness—less productive investment, fewer trained people, research cuts and more markets lost. That happened on the last occasion that the right hon. Lady brought recession to this country and it is now happening again.

We cannot afford to suffer such weaknesses at any time, but, with the completion of the single market just over 25 months away, those weaknesses are more disabling than ever. With the movement for economic and monetary union gathering impetus among the 11 other members of the European Community, the weaknesses of under-skilling, under-investment and under-performance take on extra seriousness.

Even though the final form and precise process of economic and monetary union are far from fully determined, the collective will for that union is already strong and cannot be ignored. That is the truth. We do neither ourselves nor the people of this country any favours by trying to evade that will. Recognition of that reality does not mean acquiescence or submission to a process beyond our control. On the contrary, if we face reality, it means working to gain allies for our arguments for growth, accountability and regional balance right across the Community. It means working for agreements to uphold Britain's essential interests. It most certainly means that economic convergence at higher standards of performance are an essential requirement if further movement towards economic and monetary union is to be both practicable and beneficial. To accept anything less would be to accept disadvantage for Britain—and no right hon. or hon. Member could allow that.

With or without the pressures of economic and monetary union, it is vital for Britain to employ positive policies that are similar to those long used by more

[Mr. Kinnock]

successful Community countries in education, training, transport and science. A modern Government must ensure for this country that our people and our producers have the same chances as those enjoyed by our competitors and the peoples of their countries.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): How does the right hon. Gentleman square these comments with his remarks in a speech two or three years ago about the single market being an abdication of responsibility and an apology for action?

Mr. Kinnock: The hon. Gentleman may want to take up that point with a few of his own right hon. and hon. Friends, because we know that the Prime Minister, who now denounces the process, is the same person who, when I spoke on that occasion, was whipping and guillotining through the House, with all the trappings, the Single European Act. That ensured that she arrived in Rome the weekend before last with total inconsistency built into her view.

In 11 oil-rich years, the Conservative Government have never made, and will never make, the commitment necessary to build the productive strength of our economy by investing in people, and by supporting industrial effort —as other Governments in the European Community do. Success and strength in the Community require a partnership between industry and Government. This Government live to deny that partnership. They have a huge balance of payments deficit, high inflation, rising unemployment and falling manufacturing investment to prove those 11 years of utter waste.

Success in the Community is largely a matter of economic performance, but it is equally, and crucially, a matter of political approach. Now we have it on the very best and most experienced authority, in the evidence of the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East, that the Prime Minister very definitely does not have the right approach to change in the Community. He has let it be known that the "mood" that the Prime Minister has "struck", in his words,

"most notably in Rome last month, and in the House of Commons last Tuesday, make it more difficult for Britain to hold, and retain, a position of influence in this vital debate"

about the future of the Community. That is the candid assessment of a former Foreign Secretary and deputy Prime Minister. It was not a petulant reaction to the Prime Minister. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is not built like that. On the contrary, his words and his decision were cool and deliberate—and all the more damning for that.

What the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, in the most precise terms, was that the Prime Minister's conduct of affairs makes her unfit to represent us in the councils of the European Community. There could hardly be a more serious charge against the Prime Minister, coming as it does from someone whose loyalty to the Conservative party is renowned and who has been closely involved with the right hon. Lady for many years, including her European Community involvement.

Of course, the right hon. Lady is guilty as charged by the right hon. and learned Gentleman. She proved that again last Tuesday. She is incapable of making the alliances that Britain needs. She is incapable of making the arguments that are essential to the exercise of our influence at this time of great change.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke) *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: Last Tuesday we saw two versions of the right hon. Lady. The first version appeared with the statement that she read, with its emollient words about

"the Community going forward as Twelve."

Doubtless, we shall see the same sort of performance from the right hon. Lady in that role this afternoon, when she reads her speech. But there was an altogether different version of the Prime Minister when she answered questions after her statement. It was that more authentic version which brought the resignation of the deputy Prime Minister, the despair of many in his party who agree with him, and the division within the Government that cannot now be healed or concealed.

Of course, there are those who will nobly try to come to the right hon. Lady's rescue. The Foreign Secretary, in his typically gallant way, did that on Monday at the Confederation of British Industry conference. He said some things that recommended themselves to all responsible and sensible people. For instance, he said:

"No one is seriously expecting Britain to submerge our Parliament . . . into a Federal state."

He said that there is no "dread conspiracy" against us in the Community. He said:

"We can fight our corner for British interests without frightening ourselves with ogres."

Those are all rational statements.

But does the Prime Minister, who said last week that the European Commission was "striving to extinguish democracy," agree with her Foreign Secretary? Does the Prime Minister, who is fixated by what she calls

"back doors to a federal Europe,"

agree with her right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary? Of course she does not. Everything she says and does proves that she does not agree with the Foreign Secretary.

If she shared the Foreign Secretary's rational view, and if she stopped claiming that Euro-ogres were combined in "dread conspiracy" to "submerge our Parliament," she would have nothing left in her repertoire of stridency. Of course she might still have the deputy Prime Minister. Even more important, she might not have 11 other European Community countries united against her in a way—I quote the right hon. and learned Gentleman again —that

"makes it more difficult for Britain to hold, and retain, a position of influence".

To make that change——

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West) *rose*——

Mr. Kinnock: No, I shall not give way, because of the time.

Mr. Butterfill *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition said that he was not going to give way.

Mr. Kinnock: To make that change to a rational, constructive and influential position, the Prime Minister would not have to accept federalism or anything so outlandish. To become communautaire, she would not have to be compliant in any way. Nobody else is. To accept that fact is not to "surrender"—her word. It is to face up

to the realities of change in the European Community and then to do everything possible to shape affairs in a way that will bring maximum opportunity to Britain.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kinnock: No, I do not intend to give way.

It is if that course is not adopted and pursued that the prospect of submission arises, as isolation brings impotence and effective exclusion from the main course of change that is already under way in the European Community and on the European continent. That way, under this Prime Minister and this Government, lies relegation to the second rank of the European Community. That is understood not only in the House but by the majority of the British people. They are not given to celebrating the process of European development in any demonstrative way, but they most certainly do not want to be left out of it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask hon. Members not to point across the Chamber but to listen, please, to the arguments. That is how we conduct our business.

Mr. Kinnock: The realities are understood not only in the House but by the majority of the British people. They are not in the business, as I said earlier, of celebrating with great demonstrativeness the process of European development, but they do not want to be left out of it. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* Order. This is disgraceful behaviour by those who sit on the Government Benches. Remarks of that kind, which in any event we cannot hear at this end of the Chamber, do not contribute to our debates and are very disruptive.

Mr. Kinnock: It is a well-known law of politics, Mr. Speaker, that as the stock of the Conservative party falls, so do its good taste and manners.

The British people are determined not to be left out of the process of development in the European Community. It is not fear or defeatism that guides their view: it is realism. They know from their everyday experience at work and in their wider lives that their future is with the European Community. They know that they will not get their fair chance on the sidelines.

As the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East has testified, and as so many other people know, that is just where the Prime Minister, with her European policies, is putting our country, just as she is doing it with her economic, industrial and social policies and her style of government. That is why the British people are rejecting both the Prime Minister and her party. They know that the condition of our country now is the result not only of the way in which the Prime Minister has led her party but of the way in which it has followed her—lamely, tamely, accepting every excess and endorsing every extremism. The Conservative party could and should get rid of the Prime Minister now, but whether or not it does so the British people will get rid of this Conservative Government at the next general election, as soon as they have the guts to call it.

3.43 pm

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that those who sit on the Opposition Benches, who asked me to call Conservative Members to order, will now behave themselves and allow the Prime Minister to speak.

The Prime Minister: I join the Leader of the Opposition in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on their superb speeches to move and second the Loyal Address. They did it so well that it is difficult to say anything that can even match their superb judgment of the situation. I thank in particular my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr for his warm tributes to Ian Gow. We remember him especially on this day for the remarkable way in which he moved the Address last year. We remember him always for his staunch support of liberty and justice and for his tremendous interest in Ulster. My right hon Friend the Member for Ayr has been one of our most distinguished Secretaries of State for Scotland and then for Defence. It speaks volumes about his equable good humour wherever he worked that the only nickname that he ever acquired from those who work for him was "Gentleman George", and it is a very good one.

My right hon. Friend comes from quite a long political dynasty in Scotland. He spoke of one of his ancestors who was Chief Whip under Lloyd George in 1922. That Chief Whip had the unique distinction for a holder of that office of bringing down his own Government. That was not as reprehensible as it sounds because he put a good Conservative Administration in place of the coalition that fell. My right hon. Friend has recently become chairman of the Royal Bank of Scotland which, of course, continues to issue a parallel currency. He may have a good deal of advice to give us in the future.

The House also greatly enjoyed the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes. He has been a diligent Member of Parliament for seven years and his reputation in Richmond is such that his majority in 1987 was no less than 24 times what it was in 1983. As far as I am aware, he is the only Member of Parliament to appear every week on television dressed only in his birthday suit. That is not as bad as it sounds since he was only six months old at the time and he retired from that work at 18 months for fear of being typecast as a baby.

As is traditional, the Leader of the Opposition was rightly complimentary about the mover and seconder of the Loyal Address. As is traditional also, he was less than complimentary about me. If I might say so, I thought him rather confrontational, indeed strident in his tone, mood and style. The House will not expect me to complain about that. In fact, I gave him some good marks for his combative style, but I gave him none for content. As one of his professors recalled of his essays as a student:

"He could always turn in ten pages about nothing. But he found it difficult to write two pages about anything."

The right hon. Gentleman has given his usual speech. He totally overlooks the economic resurgence that we have brought about in the past 12 years. Indeed, one wonders what country he has been living in.

[The Prime Minister]

"Until 1979 we were in the corporate state era. It was an era of relative economic decline and social disintegration. We enter the 1990s with the supply side of the British economy in incomparably better shape than at any time in our history."

Those are not my words. They are the words of the director general of the Confederation of British Industry. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. let us settle down and listen to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Yesterday, speaking about alternative socialist policies, the director general said:

"Let there be no going back to the days of industrial relations chaos, to the bogus sham that was the corporate state, to useless so-called agreements that no one could deliver where it matters on the ground at local level, to nationalisation. Let there be no going back to local rates, the principle of representation without taxation for householders, to the poisonous politics of envy. Let there be no going back, in short, to the dreary, dreadful days of failure",

under socialism. One hon. Gentleman who thought that the words were mine called out, "Ask the CBI." I am quoting the CBI—the people who know who to run industry. *[Interruption.]*

Yes, as the Leader of the Opposition said, we need to get inflation down, and we shall bring it down. I shall refer to that in a moment, but first let us consider what— *[Interruption.]*

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As I and my hon. Friends can hear nothing of this debate—*[Interruption.]*—could you arrange for sound to be conveyed to the monitors in our offices so that we can sit there to hear debates rather than waste our time coming here?

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are all well used to the cut and thrust of debate on these occasions, but we must give each other a fair hearing. The Leader of the Opposition had a fair hearing and I call upon Members on the Opposition Benches to show the same courtesy to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Let us first consider what has been achieved. Nearly 400,000 extra businesses— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Those who are watching these proceedings will draw their own conclusions— *[Interruption.]* The Leader of the Opposition had a fair hearing. Members on the Opposition Benches should show the same courtesy to the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: Nearly 400,000 extra businesses have been created and every week more businesses are being created than are failing. We have had fewer strikes than at any time since the war. Two million more people are in work than when the Labour Government left office. Business investment is at a rate unprecedented for 50 years and living standards are up by a quarter. Our industry is better managed and better equipped than ever before—from cars to steel, to chemicals, to aerospace, to electronics. New industries are growing up and industries that scraped by under Labour are flourishing under the Conservatives. We are seeing the re-industrialisation of Britain.

Moreover, the brightest and best of our young people——

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I shall continue because I have not been able to get far. I will give way before the end of this section.

The brightest and best of our young people now want to go into industry and commerce. They want to set up business for themselves and that is the best guarantee for British prosperity in the 1990s and beyond.

Britain has had nine years of sustained economic growth when our economy grew faster than anywhere in Europe. Indeed, our growth became too fast and it was fuelled by too much borrowing and too little saving. As a result, inflation has risen and oil prices have pushed it up further.

Mr. Bell *rose*——

The Prime Minister: One moment. The economy needed to slow down, but such was the sheer strength and vitality of the expansion that it has taken some time to rein back the momentum. But we are now getting on top of inflation. The growth in money supply—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: The growth in money supply is well within target, savings are rising and inflationary pressures are being squeezed out.

Mr. Bell: Opposition Members cannot conceive that the picture the right hon. Lady has painted is the picture that is presented to the nation today. Has the right hon. Lady read today's report from Touche Ross and Co., the auditors, which says that this is the worst year of recession since the war? It reports that there have been more company closures this year than in any year since 1945. How does that square with the record that the right hon. Lady is presenting to the House?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not hear because of the noise—*[Interruption.]*—but all the figures that I gave were facts. Which one does he say is wrong? On bankruptcies, I pointed out that 400,000 new businesses had been created since 1979. There are still far more new businesses being created than there are numbers failing. That is the answer.

Once inflation has been brought down, the British economy will be far more capable of beating the competition and generating wealth than ever before. That will happen because, first, our industries have been restructured and they are stronger and, secondly, because we have kept our public finances sound, unlike some other countries, for example America and Italy, which have run up enormous budget deficits. We have repaid £26 billion of national debt, so when the economy expands again it will not be burdened with the kind of borrowing that Labour Governments produce. In just one year the Leader of the Opposition's party managed to borrow today's equivalent of £50 billion.

The right hon. Gentleman refuses to recognise what a transformation there has been, but other countries recognise it—for example, Japan, whose businesses invest twice as much in Britain as in any other European country. Of America's top 100 companies, 96 are investing here. And, yes, what of Germany? German business invests more here than it does anywhere else in the Community. That is not because we offer more handouts, but because Britain is the most free enterprise, free trade country

anywhere in Europe. It is because British talent, inventiveness and good industrial relations make this a country worth investing in and because we have turned our back on socialism.

Our industrial strategy is a strategy for an enterprise economy. It is a strategy for setting industry free to prosper with laws to guarantee fair competition here and in Europe; for securing free trade the world over; and for rewarding hard work and success by lower tax on earnings, savings and profits. It is a strategy for putting trade unions in their rightful place, under the control of their members and encouraging an ever-widening capital and property-owning democracy. That is the right industrial strategy.

The Leader of the Opposition and his party have a rather different view. They still believe that prosperity can be created by politicians rather than by enterprise. They would make

"strategic interventions in key sectors"

of industry. In other words, they would take money from successful firms to hand it out to failures. They would restore a host of powers to union bosses to damage industry and bully their members. They would bring back nationalisation—taking power back from the managers who know how to run the business and giving it to socialist politicians who do not.

The ex-communists in eastern Europe are far more advanced in their economic thinking than the backward-looking British Labour party which the right hon. Gentleman leads. The eastern European Governments are now encouraging private ownership, reducing price controls, boosting competition and promoting enterprise. What is more, they are coming to Conservative Britain to learn how to do it. Wherever one looks, those who have experienced socialism most are the ones who like it least.

The right hon. Gentleman has suddenly set himself up as an expert on all things European, although as late as 1983 he was still saying "We want out of the Common Market". Recently the right hon. Gentleman and his friends criticised us when we went into the exchange rate mechanism, even though he had been urging us to do just that. We joined the ERM to give still more discipline to the fight against inflation. Indeed, that is its main purpose. But not for Labour. It wants to change the ERM to give it less discipline. Or, as it puts it, less "deflationary emphasis" —in other words, to join the anti-inflation club, and then change the rules to undermine it.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

The Prime Minister: In a moment or two.

The Leader of the Opposition also managed to criticise us when we cut interest rates, although only three days earlier he was urging us to do just that. But then he is always saying, "Cut interest rates"; he did it when inflationary pressures were rising. He is like a stopped clock. It is bound to tell the right time eventually, but it is completely useless unless there is someone else around who actually knows the time of day.

We cut interest rates at the right time, as all the indicators published since have shown. We will make further reductions only when we are sure that it is right to do so.

Mr. Beith: I am grateful to the Prime Minister for giving way and for the assurance that she has just given about the care she will take over interest rate policy. Why is she so reluctant to join the real anti-inflation club, the one that combines a single currency with an independent central bank? Does not she realise that many of the industrialists whom she has praised see a single currency as the natural extension of free enterprise and a free market?

The Prime Minister: I shall come to that point in greater detail, but I shall of course respond to the hon. Gentleman now. First, the exchange rate mechanism, with the deutschmark as the leading currency, is itself anti-inflationary. We know that. The only alternative certain anti-inflationary currency would be the hard ecu, which is precisely what we are proposing, and which I shall come to later.

Rising prosperity has brought an enormous expansion of choice in the goods and services that people can buy. It has also enabled far more to be spent on our public services, particularly education and health. But choice must extend to public services, too. Those services do not belong to Government Departments, health authorities, town halls or trade unions. They belong to the citizens who pay for them with their taxes.

Our reforms, passed during this Parliament, are now giving people more choice. Parents, not the local council, can now choose the school they want their children to go to. They are not restricted just to local authority schools, because every school now has the choice to become an independent state school. Patients can choose their doctor and doctors can choose the hospitals to get their patients treated sooner and better—*[Interruption.]* Of course, the Labour party does not like this. It hates choice being given to people——

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I shall give way in due course.

At the same time, we are devolving power away from the centre and giving it to those on the spot who know what has to be done. Schools and teachers can now decide how to spend their own budgets. More money will go straight to the classroom and less to the town hall. Hospitals can now govern themselves and GPs can have their own budgets. We are taking direct action to improve standards.

In health, we have introduced a medical audit to ensure that hospital treatment everywhere is up to the standard of the best. In education, the national curriculum and testing will reassure parents that their children are learning the basic subjects and skills that they need. The Government are determined both to promote more vocational education and to retain high standards of A-levels. One does not raise achievement by watering down standards. These are the reforms that we have put in legislation; now we are pursuing them, and they will greatly benefit children and patients.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Does the Prime Minister recall that she began this section of her speech by referring to past reforms carried out by this Parliament? Does she agree that one of the most radical reforms—there have not been many—agreed by this Parliament was the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986? Does she further agree that 6·5 million disabled people and their carers will have some difficulty believing

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

the Government's pledges today when they know that nearly five years later that Act has not been fully implemented? When will it be implemented?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman knows that most of its sections have been implemented and he will be familiar with the fact, even if he does not say it, that the Government have spent, in real terms, more than twice as much as the previous Government on the disabled. No previous Government have such a good record on the disabled——

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I shall give way later.

In training, too, we are adopting the same principles. There will be more choice for those who want training. That is why we are giving young school leavers a voucher worth up to £1,000. There will be more responsibility for those who want to provide training locally. That is why we have set up training and enterprise councils across the country, led by local businesses, which know better than any what skills are needed. Every one of those reforms has been opposed by the Labour party.

The Labour party wants to abolish self-governing hospitals because the National Union of Public Employees says so. The Labour party wants to abolish independent state schools, city technology colleges and assisted places because the National Union of Teachers says so. The Opposition have fought our training reforms time after time—because the Trades Union Congress said so.

The Leader of the Opposition is fond of talking about supply-side socialism. We know what that means: whatever the unions demand, Labour will supply.

Mr. Michael *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman before dealing with the legislative programme. I then wish to go on to deal with some of the arguments about Europe; and, after that, the Gulf.

Mr. Michael: Will the Prime Minister explain to the House how she can come here today saying sweet words about education and the care of the disabled when the Government have decided to abandon care in the community and have made no attempt to grapple with demographic changes in that area and when all parents know that she has abandoned all promises to the education system? She has even abandoned her Secretaries of State for Education, having been through three in a year.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. He knows that community care has not been abandoned: certain parts are already being implemented through local authorities, and other parts will be implemented when the local authorities are fully ready to take over those great responsibilities. *[Interruption.]* What about the money? The Opposition are in no position to talk about money. They waste it time and again and do not know how to conduct the nation's finances. As I said earlier, in one year it got so bad that they borrowed today's equivalent of £50 billion. Of course, they do not mind handing power to other people. They handed it over to the IMF. They had to, because they could not manage it themselves.

I shall now deal with the legislative programme. The Gracious Speech identifies 15 of the Bills that will be brought before the House in the fourth Session of this Parliament. The new programme has three main themes: to carry forward the fight against crime, to strengthen family responsibility, and to improve efficiency and safety in transport. The programme also provides for more privatisation; improving the town and country planning system; new pay machinery for teachers; new benefits for the disabled; strengthening existing anti-terrorism legislation; and a new approach to conservation and the countryside in Scotland.

Mr. Frank Haynes (Ashfield): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I shall give way in a moment.

The fight against crime will be carried forward by a criminal justice Bill *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: That Bill is designed to ensure that the severity of the sentence matches the seriousness of the crime and the need to protect the public, and to make the sentence served by serious offenders more closely related to the sentence that is passed.

Mr. Haynes: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I shall give way when I have gone a little further in my speech.

The child maintenance Bill will establish a child support agency responsible for assessing maintenance and enforcing payment. This will be used for everyone who is living on benefit. It will be available for any other case where one of the parents concerned wishes to use it.

The second Bill, the maintenance enforcement Bill, will enable the courts to require regular payment by standing order and to order the attachment of the absent parent's earnings at the outset rather than having to wait until he or she has defaulted. The new system will provide much greater stability and independence for the parent who is left and it will safeguard the well-being of the children.

Four Bills in the coming Session will help to improve efficiency and safety in transport. First, the highways Bill, will encourage privately financed roads. It also deals with a major cause of urban congestion—holes in the road. Hon. Members will remember the song by Flanders and Swann "The Gasman Cometh". It was the gasman on Monday, the electrician on Tuesday, the phone man on Wednesday and the water man on Thursday. This Bill requires the utilities to do their street works at the same time and to repair the road quickly and properly.

Secondly, the road traffic Bill will improve traffic management and punish bad drivers. Thirdly, we propose a trust ports Bill. Since we abolished the dock labour scheme, productivity in our ports has soared. Ports are expanding and new business is coming in. There has been a demand from many of this country's 60 trust ports to be privatised, so that they, too, can modernise and expand. The trust ports Bill will enable that to happen. Fourthly, the planning Bill proposes better compensation for compulsory purchase, particularly for those whose homes are affected.

This is a slightly less heavy programme than the programme in the Session that has just ended, but I doubt very much whether there will be any complaints about that. I give way to the hon. Member with the booming voice.

Mr. Haynes: I knew you would give way to me, ducky. The Prime Minister and the Government have been promising, but have let the side down, to do something about mining subsidence. Why are no measures to deal with this included in the Gracious Speech, despite all the promises? On behalf of my constituents, I want to know.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Member can live in hope. It all depends on how quickly we get through the 15 major Bills. In the last Gracious Speech, 15 major Bills were forecast, but we passed 45 in all. Therefore, although 15 are forecast in this Speech, there is room for more.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

The Prime Minister: I must continue. I have given way far more than did the Leader of the Opposition, which is not surprising, because there is far more content in the Queen's Speech than in anything of which he spoke.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the resignation of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe). We very much regret—[SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: "We?"]—We, the Government, very much regret that, after his long—*[Interruption.]* How small-minded can one get? I am told by my hon. Friends that one can get quite a lot smaller than that.

We very much regret that, after his long and distinguished service as Foreign Secretary and his contribution, as Chancellor of the Exchequer, to laying the foundations of Britain's economic success, my right hon. and learned Friend has resigned. If the Leader of the Opposition reads my right hon. and learned Friend's letter, he will be very pressed indeed to find any significant policy difference on Europe between my right hon. and learned Friend and the rest of us on this side. My right hon. and learned Friend makes it clear that he does not want to see a single currency imposed on this country. Nor do we. He wants to see Britain playing a full part in Europe's future monetary arrangements. So do we. As I said in my statement to the House after the European Council in Rome last week:

"Britain intends to be part of the further political, economic and monetary development of the European Community."

My right hon. and learned Friend was also anxious that we should not be left behind on European monetary union, but, as I said in my statement to the House,

"When we come to negotiate on particular points, rather than concepts or generalities, I believe that solutions will be found which will enable the Community to go forward as Twelve. That will be our objective".—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. *871*.]

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): The Prime Minister will resign.

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman should never hope for that.

The truth is that the Leader of the Opposition is trying to cover his own embarrassment about Europe. Judging by their speeches and interventions, many Labour Members seem to think that the Government are absolutely right on Europe: so do a large number of his party's supporters in the country. They do not want to see Parliament's powers steadily and relentlessly diminished. They do not want to see sterling disappear. They believe in Britain. And they know that there are times when one has to stand up and be counted in order to uphold that belief.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I wish to continue the argument, but I shall give way later.

Yes, there are some people who want a federal Europe, and they would be prepared to sacrifice a large part of our parliamentary democracy to get it. They would positively like to hand over our financial affairs and responsibilities to another body, an unelected Commission or European central bank. The fact is, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) immediately recognised when the Delors plan was published,

"It is clear that economic and monetary union implies nothing less than European Government . . . the United States of Europe".

So said my right hon. Friend, and that was very clear.

But when the Leader of the Opposition comes to saying precisely where he stands, he is very obscure. Is he a secret federalist?

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North) *rose*——

The Prime Minister: There is no doubt that the right hon. Gentleman desperately yearns for the approval——

Mr. Radice: Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: I wish to finish the sentence. I have given way far more often than the Leader of the Opposition would ever dare to give way. I shall continue and finish the argument. Perhaps the hon. Member for Durham, North (Mr. Radice) will do me the courtesy of listening.

There is no doubt that the Leader of the Opposition desperately yearns for the approval of those who are federalists, including the socialist President of the European Commission—who once told the European Parliament that before long 80 per cent. of economic decisions would be taken in Brussels rather than by national Governments. That is not very surprising, because socialism stands for intervention and central control.

The Leader of the Opposition has an uncomfortable suspicion that a majority of people do not want a federal Europe. So the right hon. Gentleman is in a dilemma. He likes to set his policies according to the prevailing wind. But he is not quite sure which way it is blowing. So he resorts to his usual tactic: the less he has to say, the more he says it.

Is the right hon. Gentleman really going to flannel? The answer is yes—I heard it. Why did he flannel, as he did on radio last week, when asked about a single currency? He tried to pretend that we could have it and keep the pound sterling as well. He seems to think that the issue can be solved by having the Queen's head on an ecu whose value is determined elsewhere. Does not he understand that the essence of a single currency is to deprive Governments of the right to issue their own currencies?

Mr. Radice: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

The Prime Minister: Does not the right hon. Gentleman understand that the value of the single currency would not be determined by this Government or Parliament but by a

[The Prime Minister]

European central bank, which would not be accountable to the House? The answer is no. The Leader of the Opposition does not understand this essential point, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbitt) put so well in the House last week when he said:

"The mark of a single currency is not only that all other currencies must be extinguished but that the capacity of other institutions to issue currencies must also be extinguished". —[*Official Report*, 30 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 875.]

Let no one make the mistake of believing that what emerged from the Rome European Council was a fully worked-out strategy. It was just dates and deadlines.

Mr. Radice: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Dr. Reid: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

The Prime Minister: As the President——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid), who is an Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, should be the first to know that if the Prime Minsiter chooses not to give way, he must resume his seat.

Dr. Reid: The right hon. Lady said that she would give way.

Mr. Speaker: The Prime Minister said that she would give way at an appropriate moment.

The Prime Minister: I shall give way at the end of this argument. Clearly, some Opposition Members have not been listening, or they would have known that I was talking about a single currency. Some of the things that have been shouted from a sedentary position show that they have not grasped even that.

As I said, what emerged from Rome was just dates and deadlines. The President of the Bundesbank is reported to have said three days later:

"This outcome is not, in my opinion, a proper basis for such a far-reaching decision as the introduction of monetary union in Europe. In particular the way this communiqué"— that agreed in Rome—

"describes the second stage of monetary union is almost incomprehensible to me. We do not need a new institution to co-ordinate monetary policy; we are already able to do that today."

Yesterday the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* stated:

"However one looks at it, the entire Delors plan plus subsequent text is half baked. At the Intergovernmental conference in December, the Heads of State and Government should not discuss dates for stage 2. They should first seek an answer to the question: what is stage 2?"

The Foreign Minister of the country that will be the next president of the Community, and who will chair the intergovernmental conference, said at the Rome meeting:

"It was a useless Summit and we shall pay the consequences".

We are the only country to have put forward a fully worked-out proposal for the way ahead—not for a single currency, but for a common currency that can be used alongside national currencies. We have no bureaucratic timetable; ours is a market approach, based on what people and Governments choose to do. If use of the hard ecu by people and commerce became widespread, it could, over time, evolve towards a single currency—but there could be no question of giving up our pound sterling unless and until Parliament and people at that time so decided. This Parliament should not pre-empt a choice that should be for future Parliaments and future generations to make.

The Government whom I lead answer those questions clearly, fearlessly and coherently, even if that does sometimes mean being in a minority in the Community.

Dr. Reid: I am grateful to the Prime Minister. I shall not call her ducky—I am not that intimate. There is one question that people want answered. If there is such a degree of unanimity, why did the deputy Prime Minister resign? When the former Chancellor of the Exchequer resigned, the Prime Minister said on the Walden programme that she did not know why. Does she know why the deputy Prime Minister resigned, and will she tell us?

The Prime Minister: That question should be addressed to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East. I am discussing and debating a single currency that we do not want imposed upon us. It was not clear from what the right hon. Member for Islwyn (Mr. Kinnock) said in this debate, nor in all his flannel on radio, whether he was for or against it. The Government are for a common currency and Britain is the only country in the whole of Europe which has a fully worked-out strategy for the second stage.

We want Britain to be part of a successful, prosperous and free-trading European Community. We want to work closely with our European friends: all our instincts and our history lead us that way. We want the European Community to be strengthened by being open to all the countries of Europe, including those of eastern Europe as they embrace democracy and as their economies become strong enough.

However, we also want to preserve our national currency and the sovereignty of this House of Commons. That, I believe, is what Britain's interests require and what the people of Britain want. It is by setting out clearly what we believe in that we stand up for Britain's interests—as this Government have done over our budget contribution, over agricultural surpluses, over the single market and, most recently, over the GATT negotiations. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food did a superb job at the seventh meeting. Had we behaved as France and Germany did, we would have been accused of being non-communautaire. We cannot secure the sort of Europe that we want through a policy of always going along with what others propose simply for fear of being left out. Nor can it be secured by the contortions and convolutions of the Opposition. The truth is that they know that our policy is right, but they dare not say so.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the decision taken yesterday by farm Ministers would not have been taken if she had not been so determined at the Rome summit to spell out the priorities of the common agricultural policy?

The Prime Minister: That is absolutely correct. If my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I had not insisted on raising the GATT issue at the last Rome European Council and also insisted that it be returned to farm Ministers, there would not have been a satisfactory solution. As it is, it will still be difficult to negotiate at the GATT round, but at least now there must be such negotiations between us and the other groups.

A few weeks ago the House was recalled to debate the situation in the Gulf, brought about by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. The Government's strong stand—both at the

United Nations and in the sending of British forces to the area—was supported from all parts of the House. Since that debate the United Nations Security Council has passed further resolutions, repeating that Iraq must withdraw unconditionally from Kuwait and that the legitimate Government must be restored. Sanctions have been further tightened, with an air embargo to complement the maritime blockade. The Security Council has said that Saddam Hussein and those who obey his orders will be held responsible for their treatment of Kuwait and its people, as well as their treatment of the foreign nationals held hostage.

It has also been said that Iraq will have to pay compensation for the unspeakable damage caused to people and property. Britain and others have argued that Iraq's chemical, biological and nuclear weapon capability must be eliminated, so that it can never again threaten world peace.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

The Prime Minister: Does it concern the Gulf?

Mr. Dalyell: Yes; it is in connection with the unspeakable damage. What is the Prime Minister's response to the serious statements made by Jordan's King Hussein about the ecological damage that he envisages in the Gulf? I simply ask: what is the British Government's comment on that?

The Prime Minister: It is quite a simple one. If a tyrant is never to be fought in order that freedom and justice may be restored, there will be far more tyrants in the world, and freedom and justice will be extinguished. If we followed King Hussein's argument—to which I listened with the greatest respect—we should never have fought Hitler, and we should not be having this debate today.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Will the Prime Minister give way?

The Prime Minister: No. I have nearly finished, and I want to pay careful attention to this most important matter, which dominates us during this year.

At the same time, the build-up of Arab and western forces against Iraq has continued. Our own 7th Armoured Brigade—the Desert Rats—is in place, commanded by one of the most distinguished and fearless fighting soldiers in the British Army, whose experience goes back to Korea. I am sure that the whole House will wish him and all our forces godspeed.

However, even though condemnation by the international community grows stronger, even though sanctions are steadily tightened, and even though the people of Iraq are being subjected to unnecessary hardship to satisfy their dictator's lust for power and conquest, there is no sign that Saddam Hussein is prepared to relinquish his hold on Kuwait, or that he will stop the brutalities—the murder, rape, robbery and pillage—that he and his forces are inflicting on Kuwait and its people. He continues to hold our people hostage, in defiance of every rule of law and every standard of decency and civilisation. The tension and anxiety that the hostages and their families must feel weigh on every one of us.

For three months now we have given sanctions and other peaceful pressures a chance. We have given Saddam Hussein the opportunity to withdraw and to end these abominations. Democracies are always reluctant to use force or to threaten it. However, we also know what happens when dictators are allowed to get away with aggression.

Time is running out for Saddam Hussein. The implacable message from the House must be this: either he gets out of Kuwait soon, or we and our allies will remove him by force, and he will go down to defeat with all its consequences. He has been warned.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

The Prime Minister: Both at home and abroad the year ahead will be demanding and decisive. We on this side face it with confidence.

4.34 pm

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the right hon. Gentleman wait for one moment, please?

Mr. Ashdown: I start on a slightly unusual note by saying that we have been debating for two hours and I shudder to think what those watching on their television sets will have thought about the way in which the House has behaved during those two hours, including the events of the past 10 or 20 seconds. The House will not have done itself any service by what has happened and by the way in which the two major and important speeches have been listened to by hon. Members.

In many ways, the behaviour of the House in the past two hours only too clearly typifies what we and so many others in Britain believe is wrong with our democratic system. At this important moment, when the country is in economic crisis, when the Government are split and when we face an important set of decisions, for the House to have dissolved into the kind of bear garden that we have seen in the past two hours is a disgrace to all the things that we stand for.

Let me comment, as is the convention, on the speeches made by the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) and the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley). I hope that the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes will forgive me for starting with him, but his speech amused me greatly. It was an exceptionally witty and funny speech which delighted the House. It is a matter of understandable, but no doubt deliberate, neglect that in his warm words about his constituency in Richmond and its beautiful environment he omitted to mention the architect of that environment, his own council, on which, if I recall the figures rightly, there are 48 Liberal Democrats and four Conservatives—our majority was increased at the last local government elections. But we forgive him that.

I was particularly fascinated by what connected the right hon. Member for Ayr and the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes. One complained about too much aircraft activity and the other about too little. It occurred to me that they might do a little swap between themselves, to their mutual benefit. I notice that the right hon. Member for Ayr is nodding.

I was speculating with my colleagues about why the right hon. Member for Ayr had been chosen. Was that a recommendation made to the Whips by the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor? I was interested, because the right hon. Gentleman is the living disproof of the Prime

[Mr. Ashdown]

Minister's claim that one cannot have a single currency with a separate pound. His bank issues a pound which does not have the Queen's head on it. He is the living disproof of what the Prime Minister was just arguing. It occurred to me that that might be some subtle hint from the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor to the Prime Minister about the unsuitability of her argument, to which I shall return.

How does one describe the Queen's Speech? It is a sad little programme for the last year of a Government who have claimed to be a reforming and radical Government; a programme which is definite, precise and active about a number of rather small measures—important but small in the scale of things—but where it should have been precise and definite on the great issues, such as Europe, it is instead confused, opaque and indecisive. On the other great issue—the environment—there is not a word. There is a mention of it in the foreign affairs part of the speech, but otherwise there is not a word—complete silence.

The Queen's Speech is sad because the Government's internal problems have caused them to fail to look to the great issues that we are now facing. We are at a time of enormous change, and it is a profound tragedy for Britain that we have a Government who have run out of steam and vision, and who are widely perceived throughout the country—as we shall see in tomorrow's by-elections—as running out of time.

It is sad for the country that a Government who have been the engine of radical reform now find themselves frozen in inactivity in the face of enormous problems.

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman intervenes early in my speech, and we have already listened to contributions that have taken two hours. Nevertheless, I will give way to the hon. Gentleman and perhaps to two or three other interventions, but there must be a limit to them.

Mr. Dickens: If the right hon. Gentleman had listened to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, he would have heard her explain that this Government have a reputation for putting more legislation before the House than they are able to include in the Queen's Speech. By that yardstick, we do not seem to be a Government who have run out of steam. A lot of legislation is with the parliamentary draftsmen and therefore could not be included in the Gracious Speech.

Mr. Ashdown: We all understand that there is always a lighter load in the last term of any Government, so that they can keep open their options for a general election. That is not unusual. I am complaining not about the lightness of the legislative load but about the Government's lack of clarity on the great issues that face Britain, pre-eminently in respect of Europe.

The Government claim to have vision, and the Prime Minister has displayed vision in the past. I may not have agreed with it, but I do not underestimate her achievements in Britain or the strength of her personal ability. The truth is that her vision has now run out and the people of Britain know that to be true.

The Prime Minister gave a typically vintage performance. The right hon. Lady is always at her best when she has her back to the ropes and comes out fighting. Like an old fighter, when the bell rings she is able to go through all the movements—but one wonders whether she knows any more what they are for. The right hon. Lady stands at the Dispatch Box and duffs up the Opposition in her usual style, but to what purpose? One of today's national newspapers depicted the Prime Minister as a beached whale, and she does seem strangely out of kilter with the mood and problems of the 1990s.

No one doubts that the right hon. Lady was a voice for Britain in the 1980s, or that she may have been the voice for our country then, even if I did not agree with it. It is odd that the Prime Minister, who was once the great harbinger of change in our country, is now the biggest single bulwark and block against it. She is frightened of changing our constitution, and of the changes that we need to make to deal with the environmental problems that confront us. She is frightened most of all of the change that we must now face if we are to be part of the new Europe.

It will come as no surprise to the Prime Minister that my view, and that of many others, is that the best thing she can do now for her own reputation, the country, and her own party, is to resign—to stand down. I guess that she will not do that. She will not take my advice or that of right hon. and hon. Members on her own Benches—we all know that. She will continue to fight through, but her party will suffer as a result and, more important, Britain will suffer, too—nowhere more so than in the area of Europe itself.

We face in respect of Europe the most important strategic decision since world war two. We have faced that decision twice before in the last half century. Twice before we turned our back on Europe, and twice before we paid a very heavy price for doing so. I believe that we would pay an even higher price in future. The forthcoming intergovernmental conferences are vital for Britain and it is crucial that it plays its full part in them. We want a clear vision from the Government—not a suck it and see, wait to see how it turns out attitude.

So far, the Government have stumbled from one cobbled-together formula to another, to hide their divisions. I noted that the Foreign Secretary found a new formula when he appeared on the Walden programme on Sunday, when he drew an analogy with making a choice of motor car. He seemed rather pleased with it, and congratulated himself, thinking that it was a neat analogy. Ingenious minds will always find new formulas to cover a Minister over a few days or weeks, but the future of our currency is too important simply to draw an analogy between it and the way that fashions are followed in the motor trade.

Another technique that the Government use when they fail to find the formula or words to cover their current divisions is to set up Aunt Sallys of their own making and then proceed to knock them down. The most recent example came from the Prime Minister a few minutes ago, when, in her Boadicea voice, she said, "We will not have a single currency imposed upon us." But who wants a single currency imposed upon us?

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): The right hon. Gentleman does.

Mr. Ashdown: Of course I do not. There is no question but that the House and this country will decide whether we go along with that, and no one can take that away from us.

To pretend that Mr. Delors, any of our European partners, my own party, or anyone else is in favour of the imposition of a single currency is simply nonsense.

Mr. Dickens: Let us see the details.

Mr. Ashdown: If the hon. Gentleman will be patient, he will hear the details.

The Prime Minister prides herself on facing reality, so I hope that she will face the reality that Britain has embarked on an inexorable process that will take us into Europe, with political integration, economic unity, and a degree of political cohesion that the Prime Minister cavils at. I remind the right hon. Lady of President Gorbachev's words that what one cannot alter one should seek to influence. Of course Britain has a case to argue. Monetary union will not be simple. It is not an easy option. It will be difficult and painful for Britain to adjust to monetary union, but it would be a good idea if the Prime Minister turned her attention to how this country should cope with some of those difficulties.

I do not propose monetary union because I believe that it will be a panacea for all our problems. In many ways, it is the least worst option open to us. But any option that involves isolation or Britain travelling in the slow lane of a two-speed Europe will be much more painful. The Prime Minister ought to be arguing Britain's case with all the verve and zest that she sometimes deploys—but inside the councils of Europe rather than standing outside them, making her arguments by way of insults and abuse from the touchline.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): The right hon. Gentleman used the words "the least worst option." Does he agree that, in practice, that very often amounts to imposition? His party has accepted vast areas of legislation being moved from this House, and, given that his party also favours European monetary union in principle—on which no other party has a mandate—does he not believe that, by the turn of the century, the Crown, Parliament and people of the United Kingdom will be subject to the institutions, and particularly the courts, of what will amount to a new European state?

Mr. Ashdown: The hon. Gentleman ignores the fact that Parliament, by passing the Single European Act and in accepting the rulings of the European Court, has already moved in that direction. The question is how much farther we go down that road. I shall return to that point later.

The Prime Minister does this country no good, or its business interests any service, by seeking always to fight against the tide instead of turning that tide—as the other Community nations will do in the forthcoming intergovernmental conferences—to her own country's advantage. The Prime Minister does this country no good by giving the impression—although I know that it is not her real view—to our European partners in particular that she wants to row this country out into a secluded corner of the north Atlantic, where she can go on playing at being Queen Canute for ever. That does her and the country no good.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): The right hon. Gentleman's views, and those of his party, on the future of the Community are well known and he has always been consistent about them. That is not a reason to make a travesty of the views held by Conservative Members. Will the right hon. Gentleman concede that the Prime Minister was absolutely right to insist that we cannot possibly take far-reaching decisions in this or any other area of policy without a clear idea of what such decisions involve?

Mr. Ashdown: I shall come to that matter. I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that we have no idea of where the Major plan, as we now know it, will end up. The Prime Minister is telling us that we might or might not end up with a single currency.

Mr. Spearing: You want it.

Mr. Ashdown: Yes, we do want a single currency. That is exactly right. We are aware that we should like that to be our destination. We may be a minority in the House, but we are in the mainstream of this debate in Europe, whereas the Labour and Conservative parties are isolated on the touchline over this issue.

Mr. Cryer *rose*——

Mr. Ashdown: I shall give way once more in a moment. I know the Prime Minister's strengths, and I understand what she has sought to do, but I do not believe that she does this country any favours by allowing us to be dragged backwards, struggling and kicking into Europe, deliberately refusing to play any part in shaping the Europe that we are dragged into.

Mr. Cryer: Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that by Europe he means the European Economic Community —12 states out of about 40? Does he agree that it is rather arrogant to keep referring to Europe when the Community represents a minority of European states? Can he confirm that the Liberal party is actively seeking a single western European state?

Mr. Ashdown: That is the last time that I shall give way. The first point that the hon. Gentleman made is a good one, and I accept it. I mean the European Community, although I, my party, and many others in Britain hope that the Community will expand into a broader Europe of the sort that he was talking about. Yes, we believe that there will have to be a political dimension in Europe. We are not ashamed of believing that, and I remind the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members that that view represents the mainstream majority view in every other European country, so I do not say it with any shame.

I do not wish to detain the House too long. I have given way four or five times and I shall not give way again until I have advanced my views further.

The Prime Minister was talking about a single European currency—it was argued that we must move towards one. If the hard ecu plan is a transition mechanism to the imposition of a single currency, it is a perfectly sensible and practical way forward. However, I think that the way that the Prime Minister has argued her case has blown any possibility of the hard ecu plan being considered seriously by our European partners.

On the question of sovereignty, I was fascinated by the Prime Minister's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). Any hon. Member who says that the option is between a single currency and a proud, independent, autonomous, imperial pound is talking nonsense. The truth of the matter is that under ERM, as before it, the choice is not between a single and an independent currency but between a single currency,

[Mr. Ashdown]

over which we shall have some influence, and a dominant currency—the deutschmark—over which we shall have none. One has only to consider the situation last year when we put up our interest rates. The faceless men in the Bundesbank took the decision and Britain followed on half an hour later. We are like a cork, bobbing behind the deutschmark. According to the Prime Minister, the choice will be between being a sub-currency of the deutschmark, as she described it to my hon. Friend, or having a single currency, with its institutions, in which Britain will have some influence. That is the truth of the matter.

The question of sovereignty again arises with the independent, central bank. I find something deeply offensive about the comments of the hon. Member for Southend, East (Mr. Taylor). I see that he is not now in his place, and I apologise for mentioning him without warning, but I find that he is particularly offensive on that matter. I have heard him say that if we have a central bank we might as well get rid of elections. What absolute nonsense.

Let me remind the House that most other European democracies—most of which would bear ready comparison with ours and appear better—have independent central banks. It is offensive to say that that is somehow inimical to the operation of a democracy. The Prime Minister put forward the argument that somehow or other an independent central bank undermines the sovereignty of Parliament.

Mr. Spearing: Of course it does.

Mr. Ashdown: Does any hon. Member believe that we have any sovereignty on such a matter, when we know perfectly well that it is not the House that decides on interest rates but the Prime Minister and the Chancellor? The House has been weakened to such an extent that effectively it is a poodle. By having an independent central bank we would be damaging the Prime Minister's sovereignty—we would be diminishing the Prime Minister's sovereignty to reduce interest rates on the eve of the Conservative party conference for the good of her party and not for the good of the nation, and that cannot come too soon. We would be diminishing the Prime Minister's sovereignty over debauching the British economy before an election to purchase votes, for which we would all pay the price afterwards. That is not a type of sovereignty which I am afraid to abandon and I am surprised at the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing). I have no doubt that he complained about the political act of reducing interest rates before the Conservative party conference. I am surprised that he does not object to such sovereignty. To use the words of Sir Leon Brittan—backed up by the Chancellor—when he was in a similar position, an independent central bank, as has been established in Germany and so many other democracies, is a solid rock upon which a genuine counter-inflationary policy can be based. The Government tell us the opposite.

Mr. Spearing: Surely the right hon. Gentleman has got democracy wrong, despite the name of his party. If he wishes to bring a Prime Minister to book, and her party does not do so, it is a matter for the House, in a general election. A central bank, which is what he wants, undermines the Prime Minister's sovereignty, and replaces it with its own. Surely it should be replaced by the sovereignty of the elected Members of the House.

Mr. Ashdown: If, after 11 years in Opposition, the hon. Gentleman believes that he, as a Member of the House and of the Opposition, has any control over the Prime Minister's actions through the House, all I can say is that he is living in cloud cuckoo land.

I agree with what the Prime Minister had to say. It is true that Britain's tragedy is that the two main political parties are equally divided, confused and uncertain about Europe. I ask the Leader of the Opposition to cast his eyes over the section of the Queen's Speech that covers European issues. He will discover that the words used by the Government are words that his party could subscribe to. The Queen's Speech says that we will "contribute constructively" to the debate, without saying where they want to arrive. We now understand that the Government want a central bank—a shift of position—but they want it to have the very attributes that would make it impossible, unworkable and unattainable. They want a central bank under total democratic control and committed to beating inflation. We all know that every other nation in Europe would refuse such a central bank for very good reasons, in the same way that they have refused the Prime Minister's own proposals.

The Gracious Speech mentions the USSR and it was right to do so. I am sure that I am not saying anything that is new to the Government, but I stress that the internal problems of the USSR are now such that they must give us grave cause for concern. However much we admire Mr. Gorbachev, in the weeks or months ahead there could be chaos, dissolution and civil war, which would necessarily alter all the cosy perceptions that we enjoy about the east-west relationship. That is another reason why the coherence of the European Community needs to be strong. We must create the unity and stability in the west that will be able to cope with the total chaos that could develop in eastern Europe.

In what I thought was a chilling passage, which worried me greatly, the Prime Minister referred to what we should now be doing in the Gulf. That passage of her speech reflected something that has caused deep concern both to me and my colleagues and, I believe, to many others—a mood for war. It is growing in Britain, the United States and elsewhere. The psychology of war is growing in people's minds. We on these Benches accept unflinchingly the need to take military action. We support the Government unflinchingly. Not to do so would mean that we were prepared to accept that Saddam Hussein should be allowed to hang on to the ill-gotten gains of his tyranny. We do not accept that.

We accept the need to ensure that the military option is kept open. That means that Governments must remind Saddam Hussein and the public that that option is still on the cards. There is no point in surrounding Saddam Hussein with a ring of steel unless it is backed up with an iron political will. That does not mean, however, that war should be entered into precipitately, lightly, easily or as the result of unstoppable public momentum. It must be entered into as a careful and considered act. War is a terrible option. It would result in the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of young men. It would also bring to an end

any long-term prospect of peace in the middle east and probably all our hopes for the establishment of a new and saner system for the preservation of world peace.

Let me make clear the stance that my party adopts on the circumstances in which military action should be used. It should be the last option, not necessarily the next option. It should be undertaken only when sanctions are seen to have failed. I do not believe that sanctions have yet been seen to have failed or that they have yet had the full effect. Military action should be undertaken only as an expression of international consensus against Iraq and absolutely not on a unilateral or bilateral basis. I say that not because that makes us safer but because it makes us stronger in the defeat of Saddam Hussein.

Moreover, military action ought to be taken—in this case there was a hint in the Gracious Speech which I found helpful—against the background of our beginning to map out not our war aims—we are all united that they are the fulfilment in full of the United Nations resolution—but our peace aims. It is important for the Government to say what they believe those aims should be. That would strengthen our hand and diminish Saddam Hussein's. We should say clearly that our aim is not just the freedom of Kuwait but the resolution of other problems in the middle east—the Palestinian problem, the problems in Lebanon and, in the longer term, the creation of a regional security structure that would probably be backed up by the allied forces, though perhaps naval rather than ground forces, under United Nations auspices.

I urge the Government to make clear their views and to work towards establishing international agreement on those peace aims. If they did that, they would strengthen our hand, diminish Saddam Hussein's ability to make mischief and increase the long-term prospects for peace or the successful prosecution of a war, if that should come about.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I am listening intently to the right hon. Gentleman, and it seems to me that he may not realise the full extent of the atrocities that are being committed in Kuwait. While we are waiting for sanctions to work, what eventually shall we be able to liberate in Kuwait? How many people will be slaughtered in the meantime? What will be the effect on oil production in the distant future in that part of the world? Sanctions have been given long enough to work now.

Mr. Ashdown: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says and the agony of those in Kuwait, just as I understand —and I know the Prime Minister does, too—the agony of those whose loved ones are held hostage out there. On this issue, however, as on the hostage issue, on which the Prime Minister has adopted the correct, resolute line, we must keep at the front of our mind what will be the basis of a successful operation, not what will solve the problems, difficulties and agonies that some people face at the moment. My argument about giving sanctions time to work is not, I say again, because I want to adopt a safer or softer line but because I want it to be a strong line. We shall not obtain the international consensus that is needed to ensure Saddam Hussein's defeat unless we are prepared to take that action at that time.

Mr. Dalyell: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, for 21 months I wore the emblem of the Desert Rats in what formed a tank crew. Therefore, I know that he will give me not a yah-boo answer but a straight answer. May I ask him the same question that I put to the Prime Minister? If one is concerned about the planet, is it an option to have 50 billion barrels of oil value, as King Hussein puts it, causing destruction over a 500-mile radius? Such an ecological disaster would surpass Chernobyl. Is that really an option?

Mr. Ashdown: I must give the hon. Gentleman the same answer as the Prime Minister gave him. If we do not tackle Saddam Hussein now, there will be a much greater ecological disaster coming down the track at us. The problems to which the hon. Gentleman refers are not small, but that greater ecological disaster in two or three years' time would involve the use of nuclear weapons, which Saddam Hussein will then have. Whatever environmental damage may be done now, the failure to defeat Saddam Hussein would result in much greater loss of life and damage to the environment. We must keep at the forefront of our minds our determination to do what is necessary to defeat Saddam Hussein. Easy options and a response to agonising personal situations is not the way forward, comfortable though that might be.

The Gracious Speech lacks content. It has a hole in its middle concerning Europe and it says little about other issues. I wish that the Gracious Speech had put forward a really tough line that would lead to the enterprise economy that Britain needs. It ought to have marked out the creation of a really strong competitive force in Britain and told us what will be done about British Telecom's duopoly in order to break up BT and introduce more competition into the marketplace. It ought also to have told us what is going to be done to encourage small businesses in order to build up enterprise in the nation.

I wish that the Gracious Speech had contained a Government programme that would lead to investment in education. I do not doubt that quality of education is necessary, but we must start to invest again in training and education. If we do not do so, the country will die and it will be a very slow and painful death.

I wish that the Government programme, as outlined in the Gracious Speech, had told us about the tough things that we shall have to do if we are to save our environment. I wish that it had outlined an energy conservation policy. It ought to have begun to address the democratic deficiencies by initiating some of the constitutional changes that are needed—parliaments for Scotland and Wales and changes to the voting system that are so desperately needed if we are to modernise our democracy. None of those matters is to be found in the Gracious Speech, however.

There comes a moment during the lifetime of any Government when the rot sets in irretrievably. I wonder whether during the last few weeks, starting with Eastbourne, then the deputy Prime Minister's resignation and the by-elections on Thursday, the rot has set in. If Conservative Members do not recognise that fact, the public, I believe, are beginning increasingly to recognise it. The Gracious Speech shows it. This is a programme not so much for a fag-end Government as for a dead-end Government. I do not understimate what they have achieved, but the sooner that they go the better. Britain needs a Government who are prepared to look to the future and to take some of the tough decisions that are needed for the future. The Gracious Speech shows us clearly that this is a Government who can now do no more than defend the past.

5.9 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): I should like to join those who have paid tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) for the felicitous way in which they proposed and seconded the reply to the Loyal Address. This is the first evening of the Queen's Speech debate and, rather like the last night of the proms, it is redolent with tradition. I see my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) waiting to make a speech. It is an annual event and, whatever the political and economic situation and changes and however rich and varied the kaleidoscope, his speech is always the same. It contains his compelling judgments and I am sure that the House will look forward to hearing him.

I want to talk about the Gulf, but by way of digression I shall refer to what has already detained the House extensively this afternoon and that is our relationship to the European Community. I am sorry that the Leader of the Opposition has disadvantaged himself of the good-natured advice I was about to give him, but doubtless he has——

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): We will pass it on.

Mr. Biffen: Exactly. Can one have better comrades than the hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer)? Their leader needs a few homespun points, not in too much detail.

There are two basic issues which should be the property of the British public come the next general election. The first is how we are to fashion the European Community with its present membership so that it can adapt to respond to the profound challenges of widening Europe to include all the countries to the east. I say that in the approving presence of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) because I have already noted his remarks on the subject.

That is a central topic. Over the coming decade or so, we shall have to face the issue of how to secure European collective security in circumstances wholly different from the existence of a nuclear-backed NATO and the Warsaw pact. We shall have to devise our own political and military solutions covering the whole of Europe. That political challenge is every bit as important as how we arrange our economic and social affairs within the existing Community.

Mr. Skinner *rose*——

Mr. Biffen: I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman in a while. I am just working myself up.

The desire to move to a Europe of partnership, working upon existing national institutions, which turns aside from all the centralisation implicit in a single currency, is precisely the Europe that holds out the best chance of reconciling the interests of the countries to the east as well as those of the existing Community. I ask the hon. Member for Bolsover to pass on in condensed form that message to his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. I realise that I have spelt it out in some detail. The Leader of the Opposition's answer to that question is crucial to the Labour party's standing and the choice it offers whenever the general election comes.

Second, and parallel to that, is the question of what institutions we think are appropriate for European co-operation. A generation ago, General de Gaulle said that he thought that it should rest upon national institutions, because they had the right to command and the power to be obeyed. That simple but rather majestic phrase cuts through all the rhetoric about sovereignty and so on. It is a good, hard, practical point. The more we arrogate decision taking to centralised European institutions, the more we rely upon national bureaucracies to secure their enforcement. Thus, the Community loses its homogeneity in the point of execution. It takes on the culture of the country concerned.

I make that point in no hostile sense to any country. However, the relevant question is which Community countries have the largest unofficial or black economy. That will give us some idea of the parity of enforcement and the sense of equity. At the end of the day, if people believe that they are within a law-making framework which is inequitable in its application, French farmers will be merely the beginning of the outrage. That is also a point for the Leader of the Opposition on which I should like a simple reply, and I can think of no better couriers than the hon. Members for Bolsover and for Bradford, South.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): The points raised by the right hon. Gentleman are quite legitimate and I can assure him that, whenever his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is persuaded to call an election, we shall put all our policies clearly and succinctly to the electorate. The quicker we get that opportunity the better.

Mr. Biffen: That commitment from the Opposition Front Bench is an early gain in the debate. The hon. Member said that my points are legitimate and that they will be comprehensively answered at the time of the next general election. There is much to be gained from the debate starting now.

I want to consider the fearsome situation developing in the Gulf. Since the House was recalled on 6 and 7 September, when it gave a most measured assessment of events, matters have not moved forward any more happily. We must acknowledge that the United Kingdom is playing no more than the role of adviser. We are not there as a factor of major military action. Although our role will be important and it will be carried out with the utmost distinction, we would delude ourselves if we thought that we had even as much influence on the United States as Prime Minister Attlee had in the Korean war. We have a much more modest role, and anybody in the House who speaks on the subject should have that degree of conscious humility.

I want to talk about the rhetoric involved. I do not think that anybody has any misunderstanding about the full-hearted commitment in this country to seeing Saddam Hussein withdraw from Kuwait. Our position is clear beyond challenge. Indeed, it is remarkable how, under the United States leadership, the whole coalition of interests has held together. In those circumstances, I hope that Heads of State, military leaders and everyone else will continue to stress their absolute determination, but not go beyond that. I would have thought that the point had already been made. In terms of rhetoric, I wonder if it was of assistance to the allied cause in world war two that we called for unconditional surrender in Germany. I wonder whether it helped to a degree that would have offset the harm it undoubtedly did for the German resistance inside

that country working against the Nazis. Absolute rhetoric in these circumstances should be watched with great caution.

Clearly we are moving inexorably to the next stage in the confrontation with Iraq. I am not trying to value-judge how that is being handled by the United States or her allies, both European and Arab. Do not let us be under any misapprehension: a movement to military conflict is not merely an extension of United Nations authority by other means. It is a most substantial crossing of a rubicon. Let us be clear: conflict has an uncanny knack of changing its objectives. In 1939, we went to war for the territorial integrity of Poland. By 1945, the objectives were transformed by commitments under the Atlantic charter, and the territorial integrity of Poland was cynically dropped at Yalta.

We cannot ring-fence the Kuwaiti situation. Military action inevitably opens up a far wider series of connections. There are those who argue, as did the leader of the Social and Liberal Democrats, that one must look for a regional rearrangement. I agree that any regional rearrangement at once involves the Palestinian issue, and that cannot be dealt with without the full engagement of the United States. However, I would happily make a list of things that could be secured by a regional pact. It would include much stricter control of armament supplies in the area. Nonetheless, let us be under no misunderstanding that a regional pact of that character is a most formidable objective to set oneself.

Our only hope is that, with the military planning that appears to be proceeding, there is also a degree of political and social judgment, so that, at the end of the day, it will not be one more sickening example of winning the war and losing the peace.

5.19 pm

Mr. Roy Hughes (Newport, East): I, too, congratulate the mover and seconder of the reply to the Loyal Address. The right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) was humorous although, understandably, sombre in his remarks about the Gulf, whereas the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) was simply full of wit and humour.

I was worried by the Prime Minister's remarks about the Gulf. To many of us it seemed to be virtually a declaration of war. Sanctions should be given time to work and force should be the last option. I agree with the sentiments expressed by the leader of the Social Democratic party, the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown).

I agree with some sentiments in the Queen's Speech, although I appreciate that the reality is different from them. Paragraph 1 at the top of page 4 refers to a subject which is dear to my heart. It points out that legislation will be introduced

"to provide for a second Severn crossing."

I am glad because the bridge is vital to the economic future of Wales. I regret that it is to be built by a French-backed consortium, that both bridges will be controlled by the same consortium and that it is expected that ever-increasing tolls will be collected. That proposal is ridiculous.

Many people in my constituency in the town of Caldicot and in other parts of south-east Wales work on the other side of the channel. Already they must earn nearly £14 a week to pay the £10 a week toll charges. That is before they even get their car out of the garage. Many of them are redundant steelworkers who accepted the advice of the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and got on their bikes to find fresh employment, yet this is how they are rewarded. There are endless hold-ups and delays on the bridge. To ask motorists to pay tolls when they eventually reach the crossing is scandalous. The arrangments for the vital Severn crossing are an insult to Wales, but that is typical of this Government's attitude.

In mitigation, I ask the Government to introduce the Bill for the second Severn crossing as essentially a Welsh Bill. It is our principal artery. Secondly, will the Government reconsider the fictitious debt of the first bridge which is a tremendous liability to the Welsh economy and is a reason why tolls must be persistently increased?

Paragraph 1 at the top of page 3 of the Queen's Speech states:

"My Government will continue to work with our Community partners to complete the Single Market."

I recall that on Tuesday 21 November 1989 the Queen's Speech said that the Government

"will continue to work with our European Community partners ... to enhance economic and monetary co-operation."

Any impartial observer would be right to point out that today that does not seem to be the case. The culmination of this "co-operation" was the Rome summit about a week ago when Britain was left in a minority of one. I understand that there are deep divisions over Europe in the Conservative party. I have little sympathy with the Prime Minister's attitude.

For years in this House and outside it I have opposed British membership of the Common Market. At the time of the referendum campaign I was chairman of the Labour party's Common Market committee. I spoke at numerous meetings. We warned, for example, of the inequities of the common agricultural policy, which today costs a family of four £17 a week. In that campaign, we were simply overwhelmed by a barrage of propaganda, lies, threats and false promises. Lord Stokes, then chairman of British Leyland, told us in full page advertisements how many thousands of cars he would sell on the continent. We have now been in the Common Market for almost 18 years, yet when travelling on the continent it is surprising to see a British car on the road. Meantime, our roads are flooded with Volkswagens, Mercedes, Renaults, Fiats and so on. According to the latest figures from the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, we now have only 3·7 per cent. of total world car production, and most of that 3·7 per cent. is produced by overseas-owned companies. Germany has 13 per cent. of total car production. Our astronomical balance of payments deficit tells the rest of the story.

During that referendum campaign firms intimidated their employees. There were notes in pay packets saying that a no vote would mean that the worker would be out of a job. I am sorry to say that the Labour Government joined in and helped to load the dice to bring about a yes vote.

Where was the Prime Minister when that was going on? If my memory serves me right—I stand to be corrected—she went on holiday. Likewise, who has been at the head of the Government for the past 11 and a half years and

[Mr. Roy Hughes]

signed agreement after agreement culminating in the Madrid summit which binds Britain ever more securely to the Common Market?

The Labour party's attitude is perfectly understandable. We say that we have gone too far down that road. Year in, year out, we are getting more embroiled in the tentacles of the Common Market. We have to make the best of it and act in a spirit of co-operation while at the same time fighting for Britain's best interests. The pace of integration is undoubtedly quickening and I do not like it. The Prime Minister has a lot to answer for.

The Government's record has been a disaster in many other areas. What about inflation? Last year in the Gracious Speech, the Government promised to

"pursue firm financial policies designed to reduce inflation" —[*Official Report*, 21 November 1989; Vol. 162, c. 5.]

This year, on page 3 of the Gracious Speech, we read:

"My Government will maintain firm financial policies, strengthened by the Exchange Rate Mechanism, designed to reduce inflation."

What has happened in those 12 months? Inflation has soared to 10·9 per cent. and the Chancellor is now making pious promises to reduce inflation to 6 per cent. by the end of the fourth quarter of 1991. I wish him well, but I should also remind him that 6 per cent. is still double the current German rate of inflation.

On page 4 the Gracious Speech states:

"My Government will continue to take action to improve quality in education."

In all modesty, I must say that such action is long overdue. In Wales, we now have the worst teacher shortage after that suffered in London. Aneurin Bevan once told us that any British Government who could bring about a shortage of coal and fish in our country were pretty remarkable. The same argument could apply to teachers in Wales. We were once known as the land of teachers and preachers. Some years ago, for every three teachers produced in Wales, only one taught there. My relatives suffered as a result of that and had to go to teach in Brimingham and London. Today, however, teachers are voting with their feet and are getting out because of the shabby way in which they have been treated by the Government. Standards in education, far from rising, have continued to fall.

One could go on about soaring crime rates and the underfunding of the national health service, which has led to ward closures and deteriorating standards of health care. It was also recently announced that 4,000 more beds will be taken out of the NHS. The Prime Minister said that the health service was safe in her hands, but those words have a hollow ring today.

What are the Government doing to protect the environment? I believe that charity begins at home because Wales is becoming the dustbin of Europe. We know about what is going on at Caerleon, Pontlottyn, Cwmcarn and Pontypool. Hardly a week goes by without some incident involving dangerous chemicals, and it is a source of anxiety in our communities. More firms are poised to establish in Wales, but I think it is time to call a halt.

According to a report published earlier this week by the Child Poverty Action Group, 10 million people are now living in poverty. What about the iniquities of the poll tax? Is it any wonder that there is a leadership crisis in the Conservative party? Is it any wonder that even the CBI is fed up? A few days ago, the deputy Prime Minister resigned. He had a most tolerant nature, but he could no longer stand the style of government adopted by the Prime Minister.

The Labour party does not want the Prime Minister to resign. We are confident that, whenever the right hon. Lady calls the general election, she will be suitably dispatched to make way for a Labour Government who will make a major effort to restore Britain's economic fortunes and create a more just society.

5.34 pm

Sir Alan Glyn (Windsor and Maidenhead): I agree with the hon. Member for Newport, East (Mr. Hughes) that we should congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on their superb speeches. That is as far as I can agree with the hon. Gentleman, except to say that Wales produces the most marvellous speakers.

It is appropriate that the first paragraph of the Queen's Speech confirms our friendship with two great powers, the United States and the Commonwealth. Those powers contributed much in the war to our victory. Now that we are working so closely with America under Mr. Bush, it is appropriate that a visit should be paid to the United States.

As we all know, the role of NATO has changed because of a change in Soviet attitudes. We must now reconsider the size and role of the new NATO and how it is deployed. I believe that NATO should be a peace force throughout Europe and the world. It should, however, always keep its eye on Europe because, as has already been said, one never knows what might happen in the Soviet Union or elsewhere. NATO should become an international force for the preservation of peace wherever trouble may start —in Europe, Asia or anywhere else.

We must always retain our nuclear deterrent. We are all aware that countries throughout the world are developing nuclear weapons and it is essential that we retain our own. In the past, we were able to tell the Soviet Union that it was simply not worth that country using its weapons. The retention of such weapons is a strong reason for preventing other countries from developing similar weapons. Countries should be aware that the ownership of such powerful weapons could lead to immense destruction, including the destruction of those very countries themselves.

We must ensure that NATO is an effective peace force and that we retain our nuclear weapons. They are essential to maintaining our security and persuading other nations that it is not worth spending money and time on developing such weapons.

The Government are right to insist upon an unconditional implementation of the resolution passed by the United Nations Security Council. All troops should be withdrawn from Kuwait, and independence should be restored. We must, however, consider the hostages. Today, I received a message from a constituent whose husband is interned in Iraq. We hope that the crisis will be solved through sanctions, but it is important to remember that all this time people are suffering immense privations, troubles and torture. All that time, we are sitting back waiting for what we call the final solution.

The House will recall the statements by Gorbachev about giving independence to Hungary, Romania and

other eastern European countries. Now democracy is beginning to develop in those countries and, if they can prove that democratic status, they may eventually become members of NATO and the European Community. It will be a long process and cannot be done overnight. One cannot change communism into capitalism in 24 hours—it takes a good many years.

As regards sovereignty, this Parliament cannot bind future Parliaments or generations by decisions of such magnitude that they change the powers of Parliament, alter its powers or completely change the political complexion. When we pass legislation, we should not rush in but go gently and slowly and ensure that what we do is to our advantage, not our disadvantage. By doing that and thinking things over, we shall be much better off.

I shall be brief, because I know that many hon. Members wish to speak. The Gracious Speech laid emphasis on education, health and social services. I welcome that, because it is terribly important. Education, social welfare and particularly health build a nation. We are crying out for educated people to learn the new techniques on which manufacturing industry is created. We should push ahead and ensure that we give encouragement by increasing such services and ensuring that young people undertake further education.

We need an orderly society. Not only must we fight crime and drugs, but we must encourage parental control. As I have said frequently, making parents responsible for their children's conduct is one step towards creating an orderly society. Children who are being guided and properly brought up and whose parents are responsible for their conduct will be this country's citizens. They will decide our country's future and the way it is run. It will be their decision.

5.42 pm

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): In the concluding passages of her speech, the Prime Minister used words that can only be interpreted as a warning that this country will soon be going to war with the United States against Iraq. I agree with the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) that Britain is a junior partner. In the last debate on the subject, I said that we were a minor factor. However, we are more than advisers, because in the past two days the British Government have agreed that British forces are to be under the operational command of the United States. Therefore, we shall be dragged in at the moment when President Bush decides that he wishes to go to war with Iraq. The House will not be consulted in any way because war making in Britain is by royal prerogative, exercised by the Crown without a requirement to come to Parliament. In the United States, there is a requirement that a declaration of war has to be approved by the Senate, and war powers legislation limits the President's executive power. We have no such safeguards.

This is our first opportunity in the new Session to discuss the Gulf crisis. It is the first opportunity to do so since the recall of Parliament on 6 and 7 September, since when a great deal has happened. I shall relate what has happened in the past two months. First, the military build-up has gone on apace. An enormous American military force has already reached, or is likely to reach, a total of 250,000 men in Saudi Arabia, to which have been added some British forces which, although not inconsiderable in their strike power, in no way compare in numbers with the American forces. Other countries have also been brought in and the clear message has come from the President and the Prime Minister that the sanctions may or may not work, but the most effective method is to threaten war. Whether, in the last passages of her speech, the Prime Minister was using psychological warfare to warn Saddam Hussein that war was inevitable or whether war is really being planned, we shall not know It is an old saying that truth is the first casualty of war.

However one looks at it, it is almost certain that, having moved a force of that magnitude to the middle east, the President will have to use that force. Although political decisions determine the deployment of military forces, when those forces have been deployed, the generals say to their political masters, "Use us or withdraw us." They cannot be left there for ever. That is another reason for anxiety.

We know that President Saddam Hussein has chemical weapons, the American forces have formidable weapons, including chemical ones, the United States has nuclear weapons, the British forces there have nuclear weapons and the operational command of those forces will be under the United States. Therefore, it is at least possible that it will be open to an American President to instruct the British forces to use their nuclear weapons, were that to be thought operationally necessary. In those circumstances, the House is bound to ask: what is the proper response to the situation? Is it right that the only way of dealing with this crisis is by threatening war, and possibly making war, when the military position makes that possible, the forces are fully deployed and the weather conditions are right?

Since the House last debated the matter, world opinion has changed rapidly from the mood of high belligerence when Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. The original basis on which troops were sent in was to defend Saudi Arabia. As the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North properly said, according to the speeches made by the President and the Prime Minister, the objectives of the campaign have already been totally transformed. Now, they include not only the total withdrawal of Saddam Hussein from Kuwait —as the United Nations quite properly demands—but that compensation should be paid, there should possibly be a war crimes tribunal in which President Saddam Hussein would be arraigned before a world court and his military capacity should be destroyed.

It is not uncommon in military circles now to hear talk of the "nightmare scenario." What is that? It is that Saddam Hussein might actually withdraw from Kuwait. If he were to do so, the Anglo-American case for attacking Iraq would have disappeared, as would the other objectives of securing compensation, destroying his nuclear and military capacity or bringing him to a war crimes tribunal.

It is hard to rely on public opinion polls, but there is no evidence from those that I have seen of the readiness of the British people to go to war outside the United Nations. It is strange that the Prime Minister, who has laid such emphasis on United Nations action, should be contemplating a war that would not be under the United Nations' authority. I am no international lawyer, but it is arguable that article 51 of the United Nations charter says that armed force can be used in self-defence only up to the moment that the United Nations takes the matter on board, which it has already done by imposing the most rigorous sanctions on Iraq.

[Mr. Tony Benn]

Anyone who knows anything about the Iraqi economy will know that sanctions are immensely powerful in a country that is a major oil producer and whose exports of oil go through two pipelines, one in Turkey and one in Saudi-Arabia—both of which have already been cut by sanctions. If war is undertaken outside the United Nations and the charter's provisions, we too shall be in breach of international law. Those are some of the factors that have influenced public opinion against war. In the United States, there has been no great readiness to support the idea of war even from those on the extreme right—the old isolationists,—who see no great American interest in a war with Iraq. I must refer also to the American peace movement and to some courageous people in the United States armed forces who, as conscientious objectors, have declined to go to the Gulf because they do not believe that this is a just war.

In this country, the opposition to war is also strong. In the rest of the world it is growing rapidly, and for obvious reasons. First, the increase in the oil price since the crisis began is already beginning to have catastrophic effects on third-world countries that have depended on supplies of oil at the old price. If a war broke out, the price of oil would go to $100 or $200 a barrel, and that would bankrupt the third world. Many Asian countries have had nationals working in Kuwait and Iraq sending back their remittances. Those remittances have stopped, and that has already had a serious effect.

No one in his senses can believe that there would be genuine world support for what President Bush and the Prime Minister appear to mean to do: to go to war. One reason for that—we had better speak plainly—is the total lack of moral authority on the part of those advancing the argument. I do not want to be personal in these matters—I do not have to be. The United States invaded Grenada, and Reagan's memoirs show that the Prime Minister was not fully informed. That was an act of international aggression. The United States went into Panama, and 3,000 people were killed—that was a breach of international law—on the basis that Panama was America's "back yard". I hope that I will not be misunderstood when I say that it could be argued that Kuwait was Saddam Hussein's "back yard", if geographical location is to be used as justification for greater powers occupying smaller ones.

Mr. Cryer: The Government are not in a strong position to argue about Saddam Hussein with the rhetoric employed by the Prime Minister, given that they have been lacklustre in their opposition to the advance of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, who incorporate the odious regime of Pol Pot, whose previous activities make Saddam Hussein appear a positive saint.

Mr. Benn: My hon. Friend gives us another example—I had one or two more myself—and I do not dispute what he says.

We armed Saddam Hussein when he was attacking our then enemy—Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. No action has been taken on the Palestinians, although Israel has for a long time disregarded United Nations resolutions about the west bank and so on. The moral authority for a war does not exist. The independent, scholarly journalist Anthony Bevins went to the India Office library and published, a week or two ago, the fact that, in 1958, Selwyn Lloyd, then Foreign Secretary, suggested that Britain should take over Kuwait and turn it into a Crown colony, and went to Washington to win the assent of John Foster Dulles, then United States Secretary of State to that scheme.

Whatever may be the realpolitik of power, there is no moral authority for a war against Iraq. No one in the world believes that Bush or the Prime Minister is moved by a sense of duty in matters of this kind. The crisis is about oil; everyone knows that it is about oil. Hence the lack of support that might otherwise have been expected.

What would be the consequences of war? I have never been a supporter of Saddam Hussein or of his invasion of Kuwait, but he has a large army, seasoned in an eight-year war with Iran and working in territory that he knows well. He has the capacity to destroy the oilfields—a point that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) sought to raise with the Prime Minister in her speech. If the oilfields of the middle east are destroyed under a massive scorched-earth policy—as could easily happen—apart from the ecological factors that concern my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow, that would destroy the world oil economy.

Moreover, if Saddam Hussein is attacked by the United States, however long he could hold out against American forces, he has another way of guaranteeing his place in Arab history—by attacking Israel, perhaps with chemical weapons. Israel has nuclear weapons. If she were attacked with chemical weapons, after their historic experience at Masada—anyone who knows the Jewish story knows how strong that feeling is among the Jewish people, who also remember the holocaust—the Israelis might strike Baghdad with nuclear weapons, and then where would we be?

I do not deny that being decisive is a factor, but I will not listen to the Prime Minister speak as though this were a recurrence of pre-war appeasement. I have read the captured German Foreign Office documents and I know that there was no appeasement of Adolf Hitler by the Chamberlain Government: Chamberlain supported Adolf Hitler. The record of exchanges between Lord Halifax and Hitler at Berchtesgaden in 1937 show that Lord Halifax congratulated Hitler on behalf of the British Government on destroying communism in Germany and on being a bulwark against communism in the Soviet Union. So the meaning of the word "appeasement" has changed.

I want to be positive and constructive. I believe that the initiative taken by the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) was absolutely right. I have disagreed with him on other matters, and I still do on certain important issues, but I was struck by what he said in his broadcast with Brian Walden. When he chose to go to Baghdad on a humanitarian mission, that decision was taken against the background of his firm belief that the matter must be resolved by negotiation—a point taken up eloquently a moment ago by the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North, every word of whose speech I agreed with.

This is not a matter of left and right or of Government and Opposition. My right hon. Friends have taken a strong view on this matter, from which I differ. This is a matter of the House using its historic function to warn and advise—functions that used to be exercised by the Crown because it had nothing else to do. Now we have nothing to do but warn and advise, and so we should.

Willy Brandt spoke more boldly than the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup. He said that he had gone on a political mission. I do not mean to belittle what the right hon. Gentleman did; he went on a humanitarian mission and, with his enormous experience of the exercise of power and of the middle east, he was able to talk to Saddam Hussein and no doubt convey privately to the Foreign Office his assessment of the prospects for a settlement.

Willy Brandt has been bolder. It is disgraceful that the British Foreign Office apparently tried to persuade the German Government not to send him. He is an outstanding world statesman, highly regarded all over the world, and he went to see Perez de Cuellar. I made inquiries yesterday and rang up New York to find out what the Secretary-General's office thought of the mission. Without endorsing it in the usual sense—the Secretary-General cannot do that—that office welcomed these contacts.

We must seek a settlement, primarily and immediately in respect of the Kuwait crisis. My opinion is that the hostages do not guarantee security from military attack for the Iraqi Government. They may say somewhere in Baghdad that, while they have the hostages, Bush and the Prime Minister will not attack them, but I do not believe that that is right. With President Bush so bent on a military solution, if he also kills the hostages, he will blame Saddam Hussein. If all the hostages were released—not only those who might be on humanitarian grounds—that might open the way to real negotiations and be the best thing that could possibly happen.

Whatever the outcome of the UN resolutions, there is a border dispute between Iraq and Kuwait, and there would be one even if Iraq had not invaded. We drew the frontier of Kuwait on a map after the collapse of the Ottoman empire. Iraq was left without control of the islands that would give it access to the sea and suffer from the strange way in which the oilfields are owned and controlled, which presents problems for Baghdad. That will still be the case after a war, whatever regime is in place. I made it clear in the debate in September that I supported the action of the Security Council. I said that it was the first time since the end of the cold war that there had been unanimity. I support the sanctions. But I see the United Nations mainly as an agency for peaceful negotiation and not just as a cover for a war by one nation to recover oil that has gone to its current enemy.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Plainly, the right hon. Gentleman speaks for a significant proportion of the Opposition. Does he recommend that the multinational force of British, American and Egyptian troops, as well as troops from the many other nations that are there, should now withdraw in order to bring about a peaceful settlement? That seems to be the tenor of his argument.

Mr. Benn: That is a perfectly fair question and I shall answer it as best I can. We all start with Saddam Hussein in Kuwait and the American forces that are there, and we must ask what we do next. My argument is solely about whether we should carry the logic of military force through to attack, which I fear could happen in a week or two. The military people talk about a "window of opportunity", as if this were some game on a sand table at a military establishment. They say that the opportunity for an attack comes when the weather is right and before Ramadan.

I am 100 per cent. opposed to that sort of thinking. If negotiation and not war is to be the instrument of policy, then clearly one would aim for a reduction in the forces that are there. But I do not think that the Americans ever intend to leave Saudi Arabia. We had a base at Tel el Kebir in Egypt. It was established in 1888 and we came out in 1956. However, within a week, we were back again at the time of Suez. I served in Egypt during the war and was part of what was seen by the Egyptians as the British occupation of Egypt.

This is a matter of great complexity. I entirely support the action of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup. I also support what Willy Brandt has done, and I support the drift and thrust of the speech by the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North. The House must consider the matter, because before we debate it again the war may have begun. Jean-Pierre Chevenement, the French Defence Minister, spoke of 100,000 dead in the event of war. Compare that with the suffering of people in Kuwait, which nobody disputes. The Pentagon, with its usual statistical forecasting, has forecast 30,000 American casualties within 12 days of the war beginning, of whom 12,000 would be dead.

Are we to sit here calmly waving our Order Papers at a Prime Minister who contemplates such an action without considering the alternative? The function of the House is to discuss the matter.

Mr. Dalyell: Half a million body bags are supposed to have been sent to British and American forces. That reinforces my right hon. Friend's argument. He spoke about my question to the Prime Minister which she did not answer. I make no apology for raising it with him. The King of Jordan, a serious man, spoke about the ecological disaster and said that 50 billion barrels of oil would go up in flames with unknown consequences. Since no Red Adair is likely to appear, because he would be unable to work to put out the oil fires, what would happen?

Mr. Benn: My hon. Friend emphasises my point. The consequences would be catastrophic. The price that would be paid in human suffering and death would far exceed the price that is now being paid.

If I speak with passion on the matter, it is because I have been here a long time. On the day that I was elected to Parliament, Truman said that he might drop an atom bomb on China. I was here at the time of Suez and heard Hugh Gaitskell talking about the war and witnessed his courageous stand against it. I was here at the time of the Falklands war and the Libyan bombing. Such great conflicts against contemporary bogeymen do not in the event turn out to be quite what they were made to appear.

I am not sure that we are being told the truth, anyway. We were not told the truth about Suez. People will surely remember that we were told that our troops had been sent to divide the Israelis from the Egyptians, even though we had colluded with the Israelis to attack the Egyptians. That is now on the record, and nobody disputes it. How do we now know that events are not part of a long-term plan to gain control of the oil for the United States?

I urge the House to be measured in its response and not to go along with the old idea of a jingoistic campaign, complete with families kissing the sailors as the task force leaves Plymouth. It will not be like that at all. It could be like the old crusades, because there is an element of jihad on both sides. It could be a conflict with the Arab world

[Mr. Benn]

for which we should pay a heavy price for many years—even if we succeeded in the military victory that is contemplated. We have interests there, and it is a small world.

Nationalism and nuclear weapons could be the recipe for the destruction of humanity. We must negotiate and reflect on the different interests and try to resolve them, because the United Nations is about the peaceful settlement of disputes and not about an excuse for a military operation on the margins outside the Security Council.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the present power of Saddam Hussein is in many ways the product of the policies of Britain, the United States and France towards Iraq? He has been given about £1 billion in loans since the end of the Iran-Iraq war. He was consistently supported during that war, and at the time of the genocide against the Kurdish people in Halabja, very little was done by the British Government to protest. Indeed, the Government increased trade with that regime.

Mr. Benn: My hon. Friend draws attention to my point that there is no morality in state politics. Therefore, to call morality in aid to justify another military attack does not carry authority. It does not have my support and does not convince me or many other people who have no love for the Iraqi regime.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in all the talk about casualties on the battlefield, we lose sight of a much bigger casualty because the war, however quickly it is won by the west—if the west wins it at all—will precipitate a major world recession? That will mean unemployment and will cause terrible damage to western nations, but in the third world it will mean famine and death, in which battlefield casualties can be multiplied 10 or 100 times. If there is a war in the middle east, millions of people in the third world will die from poverty and famine, which will be worsened by the recession that such a war will trigger.

Mr. Benn: I agree with my hon. Friend. Those who vote for the policy of Washington and London must carry responsibility for the consequences that my hon. Friend outlines.

My argument is an honest one, widely shared by people of different opinions in many countries, and it will prevail. However, it will take time to prevail, just as the sanctions may take time to produce the climate for a settlement.

I wish that the Foreign Secretary would go to Baghdad to discuss the matter. I wish that other Foreign Ministers would also go there, instead of going round mobilising the military alliance. That is what diplomacy is about. Because of the vacuum of leadership on the diplomatic side by the Government, it is left to the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup and to Willy Brandt and others who choose to go. Until we bring diplomacy to bear on these problems, we shall head inexorably towards a war, with the consequences that have been clearly spelled out.

6.7 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen) and the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) spoke about the potential for war in the Gulf and the problems there. The matter has obviously occupied the House in the immediate aftermath of the Gracious Speech. We were enthralled by both speeches on the Loyal Address, but I hope that the House will forgive me if I do not continue with that argument.

I should like to speak specifically and shortly about the fifth paragraph in the Queen's Speech which deals with domestic policies and the proposed planning Bill because there has not been such a Bill in the House for 22 years. This is a great opportunity for hon. Members to take an interest in a matter that concerns them all.

Another problem is that we have no allocated day in which to discuss local government, and this evening presents us with an opportunity to debate the contents of the proposed Bill. The Bill gives us an opportunity to make major changes rather than, as is so often the case with planning Bills, tinkering with and tidying up the system. The priority must be to facilitate the building of sufficient homes for the population, wherever people wish to live and where jobs are, and to do so without destroying the countryside, while using land in the most efficient and effective way.

We need more houses, but how many more and what size should they be? The Government statisticians told us a few months ago that we shall need 464,000 houses in the south of England alone by the turn of the century if we are to house the people who want to live there. In the last few weeks, others have said that the Government statisticians are wrong because the population is falling.

Another problem is one of size. The general view is that there are many more single people living alone—the elderly, single parent mothers and young people in their teens and early twenties. However, the baby boomers having families require three-bedroom homes. There is a dispute about whether we should build more single homes or more three-bedroomed houses.

Where shall we put them all? In the past, planners stuck new houses on the periphery of existing towns and villages, but people do not like this. It eats into the countryside and overloads the infrastructure. Perhaps we should consider the arguments put forward by a number of planners that we should build new, small villages and towns like the new towns built in the 1930s and 1940s, so that they can be well planned and designed and have proper infrastructure. This brings me, like the Prince of Wales, to the question of design. As he pointed out, poor design is at the root of people's dissatisfaction with modern developments. They object more to the design of buildings than to expansion of towns.

My view is that design should not be left to developers. Some people believe, as I think the previous Secretary of State for the Environment believed, that the market should decide design, but that would mean no planning constraints, because, for real choice, people buying homes would have to be able to choose between a well-designed or a badly-designed house. As the planning regime is so strict, people have no choice. They have to buy whatever is available. Therefore, the whole community must be involved in design and even if we cannot legislate for design, we can legislate on quality. Both should be part of

local plans and local plans should be compulsory. Only 10 per cent. of local authorities have local plans, and they should be under a statutory obligation to have them.

If there are current local plans, Department of the Environment inspectors should follow exactly what they say and should not depart from them. Enforcement must be tightened up because there is no point in having local plans if they cannot be enforced. Too many people in South Hams build first and seek retrospective planning permission. Some 90 Back-Bench Conservative Members representing rural communities have formed what is loosely known as the SANE planning group. All of us have the same problem of people building first and then seeking retrospective planning consent. We have to do something about that so that developers no longer buck the system.

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): I am interested in what my hon. Friend is saying and I recognise the problem that he described. Would he go so far as to say that penalties should attach to people who develop without planning permission, as that is the only way to deter them from acting outside the law?

Mr. Steen: My hon. Friend has set out one device—the market device of charging people if they do not obey the law. There are also problems with stop notices, which the forthcoming Bill must strengthen. The stop notice procedure is so lengthy and laborious that the person could have built the house by the time that the notice is served. If developers build without planning permission, local government must have the power to take down such a building. In my constituency, in the village of Moreleigh, it took about six years for a building to be taken down. It was then found that the local authority had not carried out the procedure exactly as the law spells out—these matters are always complicated—and now it is being sued. We must find a way to strengthen the system so that developers do not buck the system.

We must ensure that the countryside remains the country. Some 87 per cent. of the country is countryside. Let us keep it that way. Already, in the south of England, only 83 per cent. of the country is countryside, so efficient land use must be a priority.

In the cities, about 150,000 acres of land is vacant, derelict, dormant or under-used, and it is all in the public sector. There is also a lot of unused land in the private sector, but there are 88,000 acres on the land register set up by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) when he was Secretary of State for the Environment to highlight how much land was in the public sector and not being used. The Government would increase that figure if they extended the criteria by which derelict, vacant or dormant land in the public sector could be added. There are tight conditions on this, and local authorities can avoid putting land on the register by saying that it will be needed in two years' time for building roads. The categories of land should go, and all land in the public sector that is vacant, dormant or under-utilised should be on a land register so the House knows how many acres of public land is available for development.

At the same time, the private sector should list how many acres of under-used land that it has, although there will not be the same compulsion to do something about it. The Government may have to use a stick and carrot approach with the private sector so that, for example, if it does not use land, it will be charged additional rates. Measures should be taken to ensure that public sector land is fully utilised. Totally wasted land must be used up first, certainly before any more green field sites are developed. I hope that the Bill will enable some of the vacant land to be sold off fast.

Planning is a major political issue. We have not got it right. It is getting worse, and we need to do something about it fast. I am delighted, for myself and for my constituents, that the Bill foreshadowed in the Gracious Speech may give us a chance to tackle the problem.

6.18 pm

Dr. David Owen (Plymouth, Devonport): Not for the first time, we face a Session that is unlikely to be dominated by legislation, although if I looked at the legislation programme for one thing it was to find provision for no-fault compensation for haemophiliacs who have the HIV virus, almost certainly as a result of a blood transfusion from the national health service. It is regrettable that they should have to be going through the courts and that we are not legislating to help them in this Session.

On the dominating issue, many hon. Members are aware of the significance of what the Prime Minister said about Iraq and the invasion of Kuwait. The Prime Minister has, quite properly, put the House on warning that, without notice, we could find ourselves engaged in a war in that region. It was Clausewitz who said that surprise is the root of all military activity. It is an action where there can be no major warning. Indeed, if there is a major warning, our forces will be put at serious risk. There must, of course, be a measured approach. Before the point of entering into combat, it is always possible that a negotiated settlement will suddenly and surprisingly emerge as a possibility, but the judgment has been made —I think it is a fair one—that, on present prospects, Saddam Hussein has no intention of withdrawing from all the territory of Kuwait, that sanctions, though they have been supported by the world community, are not biting in the time scale that was thought to be sufficient, and that the outrages that are taking place day by day in Kuwait make it necessary for us reluctantly now to consider seriously the possibility of having to take up arms against Iraq. If that decision is taken in the next few days or weeks, it will have my full support, sadly. I believe that it is necessary now to contemplate that.

The dominating issue is Europe. Perhaps for the first time in the House, the vast majority of us are not debating whether Britain should or should not be a member of the European Community. Instead, we are considering the type of Community in which we want to be fully involved and the sort of Community to which we want to contribute constructively.

Over the past week I have read the press—the top people's press, particularly—and listened to the BBC and there were times when I came close to despairing of this country. It seems that we have begun to generate an atmosphere where it is not possible to negotiate on behalf of the country without that being trivialised, with such negotiations being seen entirely in terms of party politics or what they mean in the context of a general election.

Given the situation that developed in Rome, were the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary right, in substance, in rejecting the document to which the other Eleven were only too happy to put their names? I say

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emphatically, even to the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), who recently resigned as Leader of the House, that they were correct. There are substantive and vital issues that affect Britain and the House and, more importantly, the entire European Community, and they had to be addressed. To the members of the chattering classes, who have never negotiated anything—practically none of them has ever negotiated within the European Community—I say that there are times, regretfully, when it is necessary to make it clear that there are issues that might raise the likelihood of exercising the veto.

We cannot have it both ways. Let us be blunt and call a spade a spade. A federalist Europe is now on the political agenda. Jacques Delors, the President of the Commission, is an out-and-out federalist. Michel Rocard, the French Prime Minister, is a federalist. The French President, for the first time since President de Gaulle, who prevented a federal Europe developing when there was the original Six, is showing some signs of being ready to take steps that might lead inexorably to federalism.

These are substantive issues which are not really related to sovereignty, which I think is a bad word. The question is what structure could we happily live with and from which Europe could contribute to global values. There are some who believe that a tight Europe of 12 countries with a defence element and a security element would be a super-state. They believe that they are signing up to be a great power again. That might tempt me if that is what I thought would be the result. If a federalist bureaucratic dream or nightmare, depending on how individuals regard it, were ever to take place, what would emerge? In my judgment, we would see a neutered animal, not an ogre. It would be an entity that would never be able to challenge from time to time the one super-power that is likely to dominate over the next 30 years—the United States. If the United States were to retreat into isolationism, it would not be possible for such an entity to replace it. We would have lost the sinews of nationhood, which allow great decisions to be taken.

Within a community of Twelve, I think that the consensus would lie with Germany. It would not be German in the sense that some people fear a Germany of the past. The Germany of the present is reluctant to exercise global responsibilities and to take risks. It would be a mercantilist Europe. It would be an insensitive, rather inward-looking and introspective Europe.

Let us say that such a federalist state existed in 1980. How would it have responded to any of the great challenges that have emerged over the past decade? Can anyone believe that that federalist Europe would have deployed Pershing missiles and cruise missiles in negotiating first with Brezhnev, secondly with Andropov and thirdly with Gorbachev? Forget it. It would have ducked those issues.

Would it have been possible in such a structure for Britain to respond to Argentina's invasion of the Falklands? Forget it. We would have been locked into a consensus that would have been in favour of negotiations. It would have lacked the steel, the sinews and the capacity for nationhood to be exercised in what I believe was a just cause.

We now face Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Would a federalist Community of Twelve have responded in the just sufficient level of Britain and France? Forget it. It would not have dreamt of doing so. There are those—the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) is one; unfortunately he has left the Chamber—who would not wish a federalist Community to respond in that way. The right hon. Gentleman is against the European Community for other reasons. I want to see the Community become a unique organisation. I hope that it will not try to be a united states of Europe. That would be nonsensical. The way in which the United States of America emerged from the original 13 founding states with a common ethos, a puritanical morality and a common language was very different from the way in which the European Community developed and will develop.

Is it a crime for a British Prime Minister to say some of those things? Is that something for which we have to castigate her? She makes it clear that she believes—she is right to believe—that the British view of the European Community must be listened to and that Britain will not be bounced by 11 other nations.

I do not want to go back to the 1940s at any length, but it must be said that, at a time of grave peril, nationhood gave us sinew, strength and courage. I remember my mother telling me that throughout the second world war she never once believed that Britain would be defeated. When we read the history of that period, it is amazing that anyone could have gone through it without believing that we could be defeated. My mother was not alone. I believe that we all had the same feeling. Even I as a young child never thought of defeat. That attitude stemmed from being proud of the nation and from a readiness to take a lone stand. Let us not decry nationhood, for that is not the way that Europe will develop.

From time to time, Europe will curb the powers of independent nations, and rightly so. Those powers can be called sovereignty if one wishes. The subsidiarity principle that has been brought forward is a right one. We should determine to do at a European level only what needs to be done at that level. I hope that Mr. Delors, the great advocate of the subsidiarity principle, will start practising it. The European Community still gives us the opportunity to develop a unique structure that will lead to greater unity, greater integration and a defence identity, but it should still respect nationhood.

Countries do not always know when they are losing their nationhood. As has been said, it is not like virginity lost. We soon sniff out the important issues. That was de Gaulle's genius—he sniffed out what was on offer and sensed that it meant that France could not exercise the powers and the prerogatives of a proud and independent nation. I hope that President Mitterrand discovers that quickly, because he has made a mistake about what Germany is likely to become over the next 20 years. He fears a Germany of the past.

I ask Jacques Delors and others: are we really expected to contemplate what is currently on offer? Is associate status to be given to Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia without the promise of full membership of the European Community? That would be a moral outrage. This and other European countries have a moral responsibility to offer Community membership to Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Chancellor Kohl, who has shown great wisdom during the past few years, reminded the Heads of Government that there would not have been a breakdown

of the Berlin wall had not the Hungarian Foreign Minister and Government been prepared to lift the border restrictions and allow people to cross into Austria.

Are we to forget what we acquiesced in during that most disgraceful period—the destruction of Czechoslovakia? Are we to forget that the German-Polish border is one of the most sensitive in Europe? It was right that the present border was ratified in treaty form, and will remain. However, if there is an economic difference across the border, if there is a marked discrepancy in the prosperity of the German people and the Polish people, there will be tensions across the border.

Is it a crime for the British Prime Minister to point out those issues in Europe? Is it wrong to say that enlargement is a vital necessity, morally and strategically important, and economically and demographically necessary? We should tell the leader writers of the top people's newspapers that during the past week they have written more rubbish than is right or proper. If I were a Tory, I would say something to the BBC about its nine o'clock news. Are anonymous Tories to be the top item on the news, when they do not have the guts to come forward and say that they will stand for the leadership of the party, or even to admit that they might be possible names? I have some contempt for that sort of journalism.

I wish to highlight the real and essential questions for the intergovernmental conference. The combination of the Prime Minister's abrasion and the skills of the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor will be good. One of the tragedies is that, for too long, the hinge of foreign and economic policies has not been operating properly. A former Prime Minister, Lord Callaghan, rightly took the view that the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor and the Prime Minister should not disagree in Cabinet without each knowing full well beforehand that they disagreed, and without their having tried seriously to resolve their differences.

It is difficult to conduct negotiations in the Community unless the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Foreign Secretary are a tight and compact team. That has not been the case during this Government's term of office. Perhaps that is now to be the case, and perhaps better arrangements have now been made. The fundamental issue is the imposition of a single currency. We must explain what that means. Business people say that we must have it because of transaction costs. However, once we explain that transaction costs are a phenomenon of a moving exchange rate, and that if exchange rate stability is achieved by other means transaction costs will be less of a problem, they begin to show some interest. We must also explain that there is a world of difference between a common currency and a single currency.

I disagree with the Prime Minister in that I can envisage circumstances in which it would be in the British national interest to join a single currency which the majority of the large nation states agree to sign up for. On a calculation of advantage, we might decide that not to do so would do so much damage to the City of London that it would be worth taking a risk on some of the other issues—such as whether Euro-Fed would impinge too greatly on the way that successive Governments have conducted their monetary and fiscal policies. However, that is a decision for the sovereign state.

I do not decry the views of the leader of the Liberal Democrats, or the fact that his party is federalist. Of course, one of the differences between the former Liberal party and the SDP was that the SDP resolutely refused to become a federalist party. Nevertheless, it is good that our political party puts forward that argument. I do not share its view, but I accept that it is sincerely held.

If we decided to join a single currency, as we decided to join the exchange rate mechanism, I would accept that. However, there would be two consequences of being forced to sign a treaty that states that on a certain date we will take on a single currency. First, we cannot anticipate the circumstances in which that treaty, on that date, will come into being; and, secondly, we would surrender all exchange rate control. Until we can see clearly the nature of the beast in operation in phase 2, it will be hard to be certain that a system comprising central banks—or Euro-Fed—which will be the tighter organisation needed for those that enter a single currency, are operating independently and actually have an anti-inflationary bias. The detail is everything. Is it a crime to hold out for the detail and to argue that those are fundamental questions? Of course it is not. The way that we discuss such issues is getting out of all proportion.

What of the European view? A sensible senior European recently told me that Britain would never use its veto. I told him not to be kidded by reports in our press and by the gyrations and absurdities of the Tory party during recent weeks. We will be ready to use the veto. Indeed, when the Labour party fully considers the issues it, too, may want to use the veto. I profoundly hope that it will study these issues. Strongly though I welcome the conversion of some of its leading figures to the European Community, I am always wary of a convert. There is an enthusiasm for the convert's cause that may carry away the Labour party. It would be wiser to stick to its traditional view that these issues are fundamental and need to be closely monitored. We should not, like the Prime Minister, imply that Britain will never be part of a single currency, but instead accept that it is an option, as was joining the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system. If Britain so wished, such a further grouping would carry with it membership of Euro-Fed.

There are other questions. If, as I profoundly hope, the Community is to be enlarged, we must deepen the institutional mechanisms for making decisions and make other changes within the Community. If we want a Community of 20-plus, it would be absurd to believe that every nation, let alone the larger nations, should have two Commissioners. However, there is a great deal to be said for changing the nature of the Commission. I should not mind getting rid of the idea that each country should have its own Commissioner. The concept should not be linked to national representation.

The balance between the powers of the Council of Ministers, the European Parliament and the national Parliaments is all-important. It is again an issue where detail matters, and it would be wrong not to give our partners warning of that. Italy is quite happy to sign up for a federalist state. Mr. Andreotti is only too happy to do so. Many Europeans and, indeed, many prominent Members of this House—such as the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) —are federalists. There is no question about that; he does not often say so, but he is one. There are others, too.

Unfortunately, this is the word that dare not speak its name. Now let us have it out. The Liberal party is a party of federalists: we know where its members stand. Let us hear where more people stand. The leader of that party has

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a perfectly reasonable view, although I do not agree with it. It is an honourable view, and we should discuss it. It is the responsibility of Parliament to explain the issue to the people, not to trivialise it and say that it is all a question of Mrs. Thatcher's style. For goodness' sake, if the Tory party is not used to her style, it has had a long time to get used to it. Of course it is abrasive; of course it is sometimes counter-productive.

There was a time when Lord Carrington negotiated an extremely good agreement—indeed, it was the best available. However, the Prime Minister rejected it. Then the European Community said that it had had enough, and three or four months later he—poor devil—was sent back to accept the very same agreement. There will come a time when the Prime Minster will have to know when to compromise, and to recognise that she is not going to get everything. It is a tough negotiation; it is a matter of give and take.

Europe is a vital question for the Labour party. It hopes to win the next general election, and if the Conservative party continues to conduct itself as it has done in the last few weeks, the Labour party's chances will be raised considerably. It is in the Labour party's interest for this issue to be dealt with on a non-partisan, non-political basis. If the Labour party gains power with a narrow majority—and it certainly would be narrow—it will find it immensely hard to face some of the difficult questions. It is essential that we build a degree of bipartisanship on this crucial issue.

The issue of Europe often goes across party lines. I am delighted that I voted against a three-line Whip in 1971, when we were deciding whether to enter the European Community. I relish the idea that the issue can be discussed—in the House, at least—on its merits, and on the substance.

We have been charged with a major responsibility in the House: to stop trivialising this great issue, and to discuss it in a serious and constructive way. In the process, perhaps we can give a little education to the Press Gallery, the television pundits and others. We should make it clear to the EC that a British Prime Minister will be entitled to negotiate, along with the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor, with the authority to exercise our one safeguard—that we will not sign a treaty that we think takes us in a direction in which we do not wish to go. The Community must proceed by consensus when big treaty steps are being taken.

I hope that we will not shirk the necessity to have a defence element within the Community, but not to exclude NATO. Heaven knows, with Turkey acting as it has recently over Iraq, there is a great need for an organisation that links us with Asia Minor and the United States. A genuine Community will have a defence element, and there is nothing for us to be ashamed of in that. In my judgment, the majority of its members will operate a single currency by voluntary commitment; Britain may well be one of them. However, a single European currency, by statute and on a certain date, is designed to stop the enlargement of the Community to include Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. That, in this House, of all the Parliaments in the EC, should be totally unacceptable.

6.43 pm

Mr. David Knox (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Let me add my voice to the congratulations that have been expressed to my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley). In my 20 years in the House, I have heard most—if not all—of the proposers and seconders of the Loyal Address. Today we were given a treat: both speeches were—by any standard—of a very high order. If at any time the electors of Richmond and Barnes were foolish enough to dispense with the services of my hon. Friend, there would certainly be a career open to him in the profession of which his parents were such distinguished practitioners.

The House has just listened to a very interesting speech by the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). I am bound to say that I found his speech rather depressing. The right hon. Gentleman left the Labour party over defence and Europe; I find that strangely inconsistent with some of the remarks that he made today.

I listened to the right hon. Gentleman's comments about some of my hon. Friends and their conduct. I remember that vote in 1971, when he voted in favour of the principle of our membership of the Community. I must remind him—before he becomes too righteous—of what he did on Second Reading of the European Communities Bill later that year. We all have things that we would like to hide, but that was not the right hon. Gentleman's finest hour. He is, however, quite right about the nature of nationhood. As one who was born in Scotland but is no longer living there, I do not think that the Scots have in any way lost their sense of nationhood, although they are —and have been since 1707—part of a unitary state in this country. Nationhood is not incompatible with membership of a closely integrated larger political unit. It is just as well to remember that, and to realise what might eventually happen in Europe.

It is, in fact, about Europe that I wish to speak. When I spoke in the debate on the Loyal Address last year, I said that, in the international sphere, there was no doubt that Europe would be the dominant issue in the forthcoming Session, and probably for some years to come. Clearly, I was wrong to limit that to the international sphere. Since then, the domestic scene has been rocked by the resignation over Europe of two Cabinet Ministers, one of whom was the deputy Prime Minister. Perhaps I may say how deeply I regret the resignation of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe). There can be no doubt that the Cabinet has been weakened by his departure.

The Gracious Speech states that the Government

"will contribute constructively to the inter-governmental conferences on Economic and Monetary Union and Community institutions".

I hope that that will be the case; however, recent events have cast at least a little doubt on the matter.

It is now nearly 30 years since Dean Acheson said that Britain had lost an empire but had not found a new role in the world. I thought that we had found a new role in the world, and that that role was in the EC; and that we were participating and playing a full role in the building and development of the new Europe. However, during the past two years—and especially during the past fortnight—some doubt has been cast on that. Instead of trying to deal with the problems of the real world—which, for Britain, are its problems in Europe—there seems to be a growing

tendency for some of the popular press and others elsewhere to wallow in nostalgia about a day and age that is long past: a day and age when Britain could stand on its own. We cannot do so now, and it would be folly to try. Future generations will not forgive us if we do.

Consequently, I have no doubt that the most important question facing Britain today is our relationship with the EC. It is far more important than any of the legislative proposals in the Gracious Speech, important as some of them are; it is far more important than the outcome of the next general election, important as that undoubtedly is. It is important because it is through the Community—and only through the Community—that Britain can effectively achieve its political and economic aspirations, and fulfil its destiny. It is important because the Community is in the process of implementing decisions in connection with the single market. That, after all, is now just over a year away. It is important because the Community is about to take decisions about economic, monetary and political union, and Britain must be in a position to make a positive and constructive contribution in the negotiations and to ensure that Britain's real interests are protected.

I find it astonishing that the issue of sovereignty should have been resurrected once again. That issue was widely discussed in the great debates that took place in the House in the early 1970s about our membership of the EC, and I thought that the argument had been laid to rest. I thought that, apart from a few nitpicking lawyers and hardline anti-marketeers, it was accepted that what was important was not the form of sovereignty but its substance. I also thought that it was generally accepted that in the world of interdependence, where the most important economic, monetary and political decisions are heavily influenced, if not determined, beyond the boundaries of nation states, in anything other than small matters it is only the form of sovereignty that rests with nation states; the substance rests with the continental powers, such as the United States of America, and the developing unions of nations, such as the EC.

That means that, if we wish to exercise real sovereignty over our affairs, we can do so only through full membership and full participation in an integrated EC. It is only by pooling sovereignty in the EC that we can gain influence over its substance and so have influence over what happens to us. If anyone doubts that, I remind him of the events of 5 October last year. On that day, British interest rates were increased to 15 per cent. immediately after and as a direct consequence of an increase in German interest rates. We enjoyed the form of sovereignty by raising interest rates, but neither the Government nor even less Parliament exercised any sovereignty on the substance of that decision. It was determined in Germany by the Bundesbank.

At this stage, no one knows exactly what form a European central bank will eventually take. But had there been one last October, there would certainly have been a British presence there. Britons would have been involved in the decision-taking process on interest rates. Indeed—who knows—the governor may even have been a Briton. A European central bank would certainly have involved a bigger British input than we had because we had none at all in the substance of that decision.

Commenting on the argument about sovereignty in the spring/summer 1990 issue of *Crossbow*, Sir Leon Brittan wrote:

"I suspect that that is a view"—

about sovereignty—

"put forward by politicians for politicians, rather than one that has deep popular roots and, in any event, what sort of expression of sovereignty is it to have to chase after the Bundesbank within minutes of its unilaterally deciding to put up interest rates?"

That leads me to the question of economic and monetary union. As I understand the position, successive Governments have accepted the principle of economic and monetary union going back many years. In the communiqué issued by the Heads of State and of Government of the countries of the enlarged Community at their meeting in Paris in October 1972—I repeat 1972—there was a commitment to establish an economic and monetary union. According to the communiqué, the necessary decisions were to be taken during 1973 to allow the transition to the second stage on 1 January 1974 with a view to its completion not later than 31 December 1980. There appears to have been some slippage in that timetable.

Further commitments to EMU were made in the solemn declaration at Stuttgart early in the 1980s, in the Single European Act, and again at Madrid last year. I assume that those commitments were not entered into lightly. Earlier this year, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made an interesting and constructive contribution to the EMU debate with his proposal for a hard ecu. He accepted that that proposal might lead to a single currency. In the light of the Chancellor's proposals and his speech, I am afraid that I just cannot understand the strong opposition in some quarters to a single currency. It is the inevitable logic of the Chancellor's proposal.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Does my hon. Friend agree, therefore, that taxation, monetary policy, interest rates and the money supply would be determined not by this Parliament, and not even by the European Parliament under my hon. Friend's suggestion, but by an unelected, unaccountable body of civil servants and bankers?

Mr. Knox: When we were on the gold standard, most of those problems were determined by precisely the sort of people my hon. Friend has mentioned.

Mr. Sayeed: So we came off it.

Mr. Knox: As Lord Jenkins said in the *Observer* on Sunday,

"the question is whether the deutschmark dominates under purely German control or whether we and others share in a European control."

The nature of that European control has not yet been decided. We do not know its precise nature, but whatever else is true, it is manifestly the case that at present, as the example that I have just given of what happened in October last year shows, no control is exercised within Britain.

It is clear that British industry and commerce, and particularly our banking and financial sectors, will be gravely disadvantaged if the Eleven proceed with economic and monetary union and we are left out. I hope that the Government intend to play a full part in the intergovernmental conference and in all other negotiations on economic and monetary union. Following the Rome summit, that will not be easy. A much more positive and

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constructive approach must be adopted. A willingness to compromise must be exhibited and a different mood must be struck, to use a well-known phrase.

Far too often in the past we have mishandled our relations with Europe. We have stood aloof of negotiations, had no influence on them, and then been forced to accept the decisions reached because we had no alternative. Had we participated in the negotiations, British interests would have been taken into account and the outcome would have been more to our pleasing and more in our national interest.

Economic and monetary union is vital to Britain. Britain probably has more to lose if we are not involved in it than other countries. Britain certainly has more to gain from it than other countries. Exclusion from any arrangement, even if it was only temporary, would do immense damage to British interests—and I emphasise British interests. It would certainly prevent the City of London from achieving its full potential in Europe. This time, we cannot afford to be left behind.

I want to make a final brief but important point about Europe. I frequently hear hon. Members, including members of the Government, expressing concern about the democratic deficit in the EC. As a strong supporter of the Community, I share that concern. But what is being done about that? Britain, because of its history, has a unique contribution to make in the democratisation of the Community and its institutions. We have more experience of democracy than have any of the other member countries. Instead of complaining about the lack of democracy in the Community, is it not time that we started to do something about it? A constructive British initiative in that respect is long overdue.

6.58 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract and Castleford): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) and the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) on their speeches, which represented a pleasant episode of a kind that does not happen often in the House. They lived up to the speeches that I have heard over many years. Neither the right hon. Member for Ayr nor the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes is in his place, but my remarks are meant most sincerely.

It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox), and especially so on this occasion, because I agreed with most of his remarks, particularly in respect of Europe. That topic, and to a lesser extent the Gulf crisis have monopolised today's debate, so I shall not dwell too much on either subject tonight.

I do not claim for one moment to be a expert on Europe or the Gulf, but the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), for all his expertise and experience as a former Foreign Secretary, must acknowledge that we are in Europe as the result of a national referendum. While we must continue to negotiate the best terms for Britain, I am sure that the 11 other members of the Community will not allow this country to bring progress to a standstill —and I am equally convinced that no one in this country wants progress to be halted.

I opposed Britain's entry into the Common Market, but I accept that, as we are now a member, we must be realistic and get the best out of it that we can for this country. How that is to be done is another question. However, I hope that the Prime Minister will get off her high horse. We all know about her personality, and no doubt she meant it the other day when she said "No, no, no" to surrendering British sovereignty, but she must realise that someone else could be leading the negotiations in the not too distant future, when it could be a different ball game. I do not argue with the constructive advice given by the right hon. Member for Devonport, but now that we are in the Common Market, we must take a more positive attitude and secure the best possible deal for Britain.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) spoke persuasively, as he often does, but I have never heard him or any other right hon. or hon. Member who shares his views explain satisfactorily what will happen if the negotiations and diplomacy over the Gulf crisis fail. I am sure that no one in this country really wants war. It is a prospect too dreadful to think about, and everything possible must be done to prevent war. However, what is to be done if diplomacy fails? Are we to allow Saddam Hussein to remain in Kuwait, saying, "We have done everything that we can, and we must not start a war," or are we to remove him by force?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I share with my hon. Friend the hope that war can be avoided and, like him, I hope that sanctions will be given time to work. However, I share also my hon. Friend's view that under no circumstances should the criminal regime be allowed to get away with invading and occupying Kuwait. Where is the slightest evidence that Saddam Hussein is prepared to negotiate about withdrawing from Kuwait? Has he not made it clear time and time again over the past few months that he considers Kuwait to be the 17th province of Iraq and that under no circumstances will Iraq withdraw, now or in the future?

Mr. Lofthouse: I share my hon. Friend's views. We must never forget that, if Saddam Hussein is not removed, he will one day be in possession of nuclear weapons. What room will there be for negotiations under those circumstances, knowing his character as we do? Now is the time to settle the Gulf crisis, hopefully by negotiations and diplomacy.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Is the hon. Gentleman speaking of settling the Gulf crisis or the situation in the middle east?

Mr. Lofthouse: The Gulf crisis was really the subject of earlier speeches. Hussein has occupied Kuwait by force, with the intention of seizing control of other Arab states and the oil wells that go with them.

I must admit to disappointment at what has been omitted from the Gracious Speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) intervened during the Prime Minister's speech, in his usual manner, to express concern about the Bill on mining subsidence, which, while not the subject of any promise, was expected to be included in the new Session's business. I am sure that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will call me to order if I start to refer to a Bill that is not part of the Gracious Speech, but perhaps I may continue, given that the Gracious Speech concludes with the words,

"Other measures will be laid before you."

Since 1957, British Coal operated a policy on mining subsidence compensation that existed until 1975, when it

was superseded by the Coal Industry Act 1975. That legislation placed an obligation on British Coal to restore houses damaged by subsidence to their former state as soon as possible. In special cases, national compensation was payable where the cost of the repairs was in excess of the value of the property.

For many years, that scheme did not operate satisfactorily, because different British Coal areas interpreted it in different ways and people in certain areas allegedly received better treatment than others. The scheme's shortcomings were highlighted in evidence given to the Select Committee on Energy in 1986 by the Coal Board's chairman, Sir Ian MacGregor, when it was shown that the cost of the scheme to British Coal was £250 million, and that £200 million of that had gone in compensation payments in Nottingham—and only £50 million for the rest of the country. I know that Nottingham suffered from severe damage, but criminal charges were made against some individuals, and I understand that some people went to prison.

The Government had already decided to set up an inquiry—eventually called the Waddilove inquiry—prior to the problem in Nottinghamshire. In 1983, the Waddilove committee reported and made 65 recommendations, many of which were welcome to people in mining communities whose properties had been damaged. In 1987-88, the Energy Select Committee inquired further into the subject of subsidence and found that the Government were still sitting on the Waddilove report and had failed to take any action on it. The Committee decided that it would make a further investigation into mining subsidence problems caused by British Coal.

The Committee set about its inquiry by taking evidence from experts from various parts of our coalfields, from people whose property had suffered from subsidence, and from British Coal. The Committee reported on 17 July this year, and made 21 recommendations.

The Government's response to some of the Committee's recommendations has been encouraging. The then Minister acknowledged the problems and promised that a Bill would be introduced at the earliest opportunity. He did not specify when, but people in mining communities expected it to be this year. Unfortunately, that has not happened.

I hope that the Government will introduce legislation on subsidence as part of the other measures that are to be brought forward. I had some encouragement from one of the Prime Minister's answers this afternoon. If that is the case, I ask the Government to take the recommendations of the Select Committee into consideration. That Committee had the privilege of listening to the experts. While I do not expect any Government to legislate on everything that a Select Committee finds, much of the advice and the recommendations by such Committees is wise. I feel sure that, if the Government had taken the slightest bit of notice of the Select Committee's report on the privatisation of electricity, they would not have got themselves into the mess that they got into in the early days. The Committee advised the Government to put the reins on and to go steady. If they had done so, they would have produced more satisfactory legislation.

The Committee did not consider one important aspect of subsidence—the blight which affects the damaged areas. I accept that this is a difficult problem. For example, two or three homes in an area can be badly damaged while neighbouring houses are untouched, but owners of the neighbouring properties will be unable to sell their homes because they are in a blighted area.

An example has come to light in recent weeks in a litte village called Darrington in my constituency. Homes are expensive there, and most of them belong to people in the professional classes, who now find themselves in difficulties because their expensive homes have been damaged. British Coal has dealt with their claims. However, a gentleman came to se me the other day and said that bungalows on either side of his property had been marketed at £125,000—that is a high price for my constituency—but had been damaged to such an extent that British Coal had bought them. His bungalow lies in between them. He has been made redundant from the mining industry and has found a job in Lancashire. but because his bungalow is situated between those properties and is in an area which is subject to subsidence, he cannot sell it. That is a major problem. I hope that, if and when the Government introduce a Bill to deal with subsidence, they will consider that matter.

In some cases, houses have been repaired but have been left with a tilt. British Coal has no obligation to pay for that. British Coal has offered two of my constituents, Mr. Simpson and Mr. Wilcox, £2,500, which it later increased to £3,500 to pay for the tilt. That would appear to be fair, until one considers that houses in the area are valued at between £33,000 and £35,000. British Coal has had to buy some of the houses in the area because of the tilt. There is no obligation upon it to do so, but it has taken that decision in the case of certain houses.

British Coal is advertising for sale three of the houses which have suffered subsidence. In the advertisement, it states that, owing to mining subsidence, it is selling the properties for £11,500, £12,000 and £10,000—houses which had a market value of £33,000 before they were damaged. However, British Coal is only offering my constituents £3,500 in compensation, despite the fact that its advertisements acknowledge that it will only be able to get £10,000 or £11,000 for them. That is unjust. It is not fair that an owner-occupier can only get £11,000 or £12,000 for his house but is offered only £3,500 in compensation by British Coal. That is not on.

I hope that the Government will seriously consider introducing a Bill which will give British Coal the statutory obligation to rectify the matter. It does not seem as if they will, but politics is a funny old game. If a Tory Government return after the next election, British Coal will be privatised. If that happens, private owners will have no obligation—according to my legal advice—to compensate under present legislation in the same way that British Coal has an obligation to do.

This is a serious matter. I hope that the Government will note the points that I have made and introduce a Bill as soon as is humanly possible that incorporates them.

7.19 pm

Mr. David Madel (Bedfordshire, South-West): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse), just as it was to be on the Committee that he chaired which considered the Employment Bill last Session. I agree fully with what he said about the proposer and seconder of the motion and also with what he said about the Gulf. He reminded us that if international disputes are solved by force rather than

[Mr. David Madel]

negotiation, the United Nations authority is completely undermined. The spirit of 1945, when the United Nations was set up in San Francisco, is also undermined.

If one is considering redrawing the map of the middle east, the first thing, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said, is for Saddam Hussein to get out of Kuwait and for the United Nations to conduct international negotiations. It should never be forgotten that Kuwait is recognised in international law and by the United Nations as a sovereign, independent state. There is no point in arguing about the Ottoman empire and what happened then. One has to deal with what has happened since 1945, which is what the hon. Gentleman did.

This may be the last Queen's Speech before the general election. I hope that it is not. So many reforms have been implemented that the maximum amount of time is needed before the electorate can see what benefits they bring. A further Session of Parliament, starting in November 1991, would provide the Government with more time to demonstrate their general competence in handling issues as they arise.

The Queen's Speech contains, as I see it, four transport Bills. They are prefaced by the words:

"My Government will promote improved efficiency and safety in transport."

I hope that the Government will try to make better use of the transport system that we already have. There is a limit to the amount of motorway and bypass construction that there can be. We should experiment with new traffic management schemes and try to improve the flow of traffic on the existing motorways. If that means a reduction of speed limits in certain areas at certain times, so be it.

I welcome also the absence from the Queen's Speech of trade union legislation and local government reform. Both should be left well alone so that the major changes that are already in place have time to take effect.

The Queen's Speech also contains the sentence:

"Other measures will be laid before you."

I hope that they are not, unless there is a great national emergency. The absence of trade union and local government legislation and a general reduction in the number of Bills would provide us with more time for exploratory debates in which to consider issues not so much from the point of view of legislation but from the point of view of our general philosophy and how we run our democracy.

We should look again at reform of the House of Lords. I am passionately in favour of this country always having two-chamber government. Single-chamber government is terribly dangerous. We should seek agreement between the parties on how to proceed. The Liberal Democrats have taken an interest in the question and there have been occasions when we have reached agreement with that party in the House of Commons. It is much more difficult to reach agreement locally. When general elections take place, I should like the percentage of votes that parties get at regional level to entitle them to a topping up system in the House of Lords.

Regional policy is now based on employment creation through improved competitiveness. That in turn requires employment cost-effectiveness, especially in small firms. If we want that to continue, as I do, it needs to be buttressed by greater regional representation in our Houses of Parliament. I should insist on whoever was sent here from the regions, as a result of the parties obtaining a percentage of the votes there, being decided by the parties in the regions. I do not want a magic circle at the centre to decide who is to sit in the reformed House of Lords. It is vital that the second chamber should be given a more secure place in our constitutional system.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Although the hon. Gentleman says that is it hard for the Conservative party to reach agreement with the Labour party on the issue, he knows that the Labour party has a clear view about reform of the House of Lords. It believes that the new structure of the House of Lords should incorporate democratic accountability, based on the regions and proportional representation. If, however, there is not to be an inner circle at the centre, the hon. Gentleman will have to devise a properly democratic method of reform. It is no use mucking around at the edges.

Mr. Madel: I do not regard mucking around at the edges as being the same as the regional parties—the powers within the regions—deciding who goes to the House of Lords. To take East Anglia as a region, everyone in the region knows who makes a contribution to political life there. People know who has stood for Parliament in East Anglia or who has served at district or county council level. East Anglia forms a natural region. The parties in that area would be perfectly capable of topping up the House of Lords with representatives, based on a percentage of the popular vote that they obtained there.

I mentioned how pleased I am that there is to be no new trade union legislation. That does not mean, however, that we should do nothing. I know that the Government did not like the TUC's initiative on wages, but we do not need to discuss just a wages policy. If we cannot agree about that, there is a whole host of other issues on which we could and should reach agreement with the trade unions. We should pay special regard to the fact that constant changes in the market place require new skills and therefore new training. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Employment announced recently that the training and enterprise councils can now introduce their own voucher schemes for adult trainees. There will, I hope, be more regional training, based on co-operation between management and trade unions at regional level. It would provide an opportunity for closer contact between the Government and trade unions.

To that must be added the constant flow of directives and suggestions from Brussels, to which this country must respond. It would be so much better if the response was based on agreement between management and unions. All members of the EEC have their own history of employment, training and the management of industrial matters.

Eastern Europe provides a marvellous opportunity for industry in this country to gain export orders and thus a real share of the market. It is also a tremendous challenge. I single out the components industry, which supplies the engineering, motor car and truck industries. It will be relatively easy for firms in eastern Europe to produce components. We do not want our competitive edge to be lost there. That is why, above all, management and unions must see to it that components are manufactured in this country both effectively and competitively. We must also ensure that those who do the work on the factory floor are properly trained.

I welcome the announcement in the Queen's Speech that

"a Bill will be introduced to establish new machinery for negotiating the pay and conditions of school teachers in England and Wales."

There will be, in other words, a new salaries Bill. I should like the Government to think hard about one issue. In the teachers' contracts, I should like proper attention to be paid to the fact that many young people could do their homework better at school than at home. Conditions for studying at home are not ideal for many young people. If, however, homework is done at school, teacher supervision will be required. Teachers will therefore have additional work to do. I have discussed it with them locally. They say that in principle it is fine, but that their contracts of service must reflect the fact that they will be carrying out additional supervisory duties at school because homework is being done voluntarily there by some pupils. I hope that that will come about under the new pay machinery.

I hope that there will remain a clear recognition that changing the A-level will be possible one day, but that there is nowhere near enough evidence from the performance at GCSE level to say that we should make that change now. We need more time to see how the results of the GCSE reflect a pupil's ability to go on to A-levels.

The greatest need is to rethink how best to use teachers' time. If we wish to see developments on such a broad front together with quality teaching, we have to create the space in two ways. First, we must reduce teacher load so that there is time to devote to development as well as to lesson preparation, teaching, marking, examining, tutoring and all the extra-curricular activities. We could do that by a limited duration injection of additional resources to create what I would call thinking and planning time within the timetable.

Secondly, we need to increase non-teaching support staff so that teachers do not have to carry out so many routine clerical tasks. There may be a serious shortage of teachers—no doubt we can argue about that—but there is no shortage of support staff. An increase in the number of such staff and better use of them would mean better use of teaching time and, inevitably, better results in the classroom, more people going on to higher education and a greater standard of living in this country. If we can work out an efficient and effective use of teachers' time with an attractive salary package plus a clear recognition that the local authority sector must always be promoting a sensible balance between efficient school management and a fair allocation of resources, we will see rewards in education and advantages for young people. That will be brought about as a result of the new Bill and the changes in the curriculum.

I would not want this occasion to pass without paying special tribute to my right hon. Friend the new Leader of the House for all he did as Secretary of State for Education and Science. He started to win back teacher support and enthusiasm for discussing with the Government how best to improve the education system.

A fourth term of Conservative Government is perfectly possible. The Christian Democrats in Germany have done it. Dr. Adenauer was returned as Federal Chancellor four times basically by having a policy that steadily increased prosperity and avoided any drastic upheavals. The Opposition certainly cannot guarantee prosperity and there would be plenty of upheavals if they came to power. The choice at the next general election is between gradualism or upheavalism. The British people know what they would prefer; they must make sure that they get what they want.

7.32 pm

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): I welcome this opportunity to make a brief and limited contribution to the debate. Prior to my being called, my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) asked me whether I intended to speak about Northern Ireland, the middle east or Europe. I said, "Yes." In effect, however it is dressed up or presented, we are talking about the same thing in those three areas of contention.

The hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Mr. Lofthouse) made an excellent speech as, he may remember, he did last year and the year before. In this type of debate it is essential to raise an issue that is not tied to the big issues being dealt with by everybody else. I commend the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford for the admirable way in which he presented his important case.

I should like to refer to the speech made by the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn)—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member has just entered the Chamber and I now realise that I have got it wrong. I mean the speech of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). I know that the right hon. Member for Chesterfield will forgive me for that confusion.

Mr. Winnick: He could sue you.

Mr. Mallon: He certainly could, but I am sure that he will appreciate that it was not done with malice.

I was astounded to hear the speech of the right hon. Member for Devonport. It was the most virulent anti-European speech I have heard for a long time. I wondered on what side of the House I was sitting. Every single word of his speech smacked of a limited appreciation not just of the Britain or Europe in which we live now, but the nature of the world in which we live. I found it astounding and anachronistic that someone with the right hon. Gentleman's experience should have put that on the record in the way that he did and at the time that he did. However, it was followed by a remarkable speech from the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox). He presented one of the most enlightened and clearest speeches on European membership that I have heard for a long time.

I should like to pursue that line, but, coming from the north of Ireland, it is difficult to do so. I come from probably the most troubled part of Europe and it would be remiss of me not to make some specific points. I tried to do the same last year, as I have every year since coming to the House. It is essential that those of us who represent the north of Ireland should do so within the democratic forum to which we are elected. It is important to ask our colleagues in the House to listen to us. We ask them to agree or disagree with us because that is the essence of democracy and we ask them to look at what is probably the most difficult problem that has been facing Parliament for 21 years. I do not wish to denigrate the importance of the problems in Iraq or Kuwait, the European issue or any of the greater international problems. However, for the past 21 years Parliament has been trying to bring about peace in the north of Ireland. Therefore, although I would

[Mr. Mallon]

dearly love to pursue the debate on the middle east and Europe, I must draw the House's attention to the single most pressing, immediate and long-standing problem in the north of Ireland.

I want to make three observations. I know that there will be opportunities to expand on this and there will be opportunities ad infinitum to make the same speech again, because one of the awful certainties about the north of Ireland is that, as the years pass, someone will be making the same speech. Someone will be making the same speech next year. I hope that it is me, but I cannot predict that. I can say that, unless something is done, someone will be standing in this place making the same point and trying to convince this democratically elected House of the nature and extent of the problem.

First let me deal with an injustice in the north of Ireland, as all hon. Members will certainly appreciate. As soon as I mention injustice hon. Members' shoulders go up because they anticipate that I shall be pointing out that I do not agree with legislation, which I do not, as I shall show later, or talking about some aspect of the violence. I am not, but in other ways I am. One aspect of the violence is deprivation. It was not invented by the Provisional Irish Republican Army, the Ulster Defence Regiment, the Ulster Volunteer Force or any paramilitary organisation. The violence of economic and social deprivation has existed since the northern Irish state was founded. It still exists to such an extent that according to this morning's papers, which published figures on poverty for European Community countries, the north of Ireland figure is 28 per cent. compared with about 16 per cent. for the next nearest country. The definition of poverty took into account all the social security available. The figure increases to 38 per cent. if child poverty is included.

That violence does not stem from an action or a reaction of the Government or of a paramilitary grouping. It stems from the human and political condition in the north of Ireland and I ask the Government to do something about it. Every year that passes with a child poverty level of 38 per cent. will be reflected in the figures on violence and paramilitarism. They are there for all to see. They are a matter of European record and on record within this Parliament. I again implore the Government, as I do every year, to consider that factor.

Neglect and poverty are among the greatest factors of violence in Northern Ireland. It is the violence of not allowing people to have the standard of living to which everybody should be entitled. Sceptics will say that it is there if people choose to get out of bed and work and that if they want work they can find it and have a decent standard of living. Let me tell the House again that this is an endemic problem. If only the people of England, Scotland and Wales knew exactly how much of their taxes were poured down the drain in Northern Ireland every year to try to find a security solution to a problem which is not one of security, they would react strongly. Millions of pounds have been spent on trying to find a solution to a problem which is not the problem facing us.

I can extend the argument to income support, family credit and the new range of social security benefits. The House must remember that, before claiming benefits, the people of Northern Ireland are 30 per cent. poorer than anyone else in the area governed by this Parliament. Therefore, if there is to be parity with the other regions, the people of Northern Ireland will have to have a 30 per cent. increase. That is in addition to the 38 per cent. child poverty trap, which speaks for itself.

Secondly, when I read the Gracious Speech it did not surprise me that the only reference to the north of Ireland related to more, bigger and better emergency legislation. After 21 years will anybody say, "Hold on, we have had the most stringent emergency legislation and unlimited financial resources to pursue a security solution. We have had a strong Army presence coupled with the UDR, the police and the reserve police and all the resources that go with that, yet the Gracious Speech tells us that we shall have more of the same"? That 21 years is a rake's progress, starting from a negative position and, at the expense of British taxpayers, slowly pursuing something that does not exist. It is like chasing the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow; there is no security solution to the problem.

There is no way in which this Government or a Government formed from either side of the House can obtain a security solution to the problem, irrespective of the type of legislation or the amount of money thrown at it. Throughout that period it has been shown clearly that such legislation, which will be debated in Committee for two months, will not solve the problem. Please try to realise that there is no security solution to the problem.

I am tempted to draw conclusions from the recent debate on the Gulf, but I will not, because that is not to compare like with like. As someone who spends week after week trying to pick up the pieces caused by violence and this type of negative legislation, I know that in another year, five years or 10 years another Government will be in office debating another Gracious Speech which, at most, will contain another piece of emergency legislation, unless we realise that that will not solve the problem. That is difficult for a Government and a Parliament who believe that problems can be solved by force.

I was intrigued that the right hon. Member for Devonport laughed when he talked about his mother's reaction to the concept that the war might be lost. There is a feeling in Parliament and the country that with enough ammunition, money and people in uniform, we will win. We may win, but will we lose, because, at the end of the day, there is an absolute distinction between salvaging the political dignity that is achieved by security solutions and force of arms, and achieving the solution to the problem, as we set out to do.

The third issue I want to raise is an unpopular one. Occasionally I am howled down in this House and within my party for raising it, but it must be said and the more often, the better. What is the objective of the Government, my party, other political parties in the north of Ireland and the Government of the Republic? Is it to beat the IRA or to create peace? We must continually ask that question. After 21 years in politics I do not believe that I have to convince anyone of my detestation of the IRA and its violence. What is left to me in my remaining years as an active politician? Am I to stand here and repeat my detestation of violence and the IRA or should I try to create conditions that will contribute to solving the problem? We must all answer that question. The longer we go without facing up to the three fundamental and difficult issues I have raised, the longer we will put aside the time when we can start to solve the problems. It will not be easy for anyone.

In the debate on the Gracious Speech last year I set out four things that must be undertaken if we are to get to grips with the creation, or re-creation, of a political process that will cope with the problems of Northern Ireland. Those four conditions are even more crucial today. It is too easy, however, to hide behind cliches. If one asks anybody on this side of the water or in the Republic what they mean by solving the problem, they answer that we should "Get together". We get together every day of the week, but those people mean we should get together politically. But what does that mean? They take it to mean devolution, but those people should examine what that means. Does it mean that I could set about solving the problems in the north of Ireland or does it mean that I should attempt to solve those problems, if I chose foolishly to do so, under terms decided by the House? That is the fourth issue that this House must address.

Devolution was tried in 1921 and it lasted until 1973. It failed between 1921 and 1973; it failed in 1973 and 1974 and it failed again when the then Secretary of State, James Prior, tried, foolishly, to impose it. That proposed solution has failed ever since.

I ask the House to have the courage to look some of its sacred cows in the face. I know that I shall be hung because of that statement. I know that there will be those on the Benches around me who will pick up *Hansard* and say, "He doesn't believe in devolution. He does not agree that it will solve the problem". Let me reiterate what I have said: I do not believe that it will solve the problem. We should not waste our time, that of any Secretary of State or of anyone else pursuing a line of approach that I firmly believe will not solve the problem.

We should sit down and look at what has failed us in the past. We must consider the elements with which we must cope, some of which I have mentioned today. We should consider some of the structures available to us, not least the European structures to which the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands referred. It is not as though we have been too damned lazy to look at possibilities in the past—I know you will forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for putting it in those terms—but it is almost as though we have been frozen in time when attempting to solve the problem.

If we can attempt to settle European and other world problems through the use of new and different structures, what is wrong with trying to work out why we have failed so often in the past? I put that argument last year, the year before and the year before that. I hope that I shall be here next year to restate it. I hope that someone on these Benches will always make that argument until we encourage this House to start to face up to the reality of the problems. Until we do, we are hiding behind knee-jerk reactions. We all have such reactions when we condemn violence every week. Two weeks ago that violence cost the lives of 11 people and in recent months 15 people have died in my constituency.

It is right that we should condemn such violence and for everyone to know how we feel, but that is not enough. A change is needed. We must consider solutions that have not been tried before. In that way we can start to solve the problem and then there will be no need to speak about it next year and no need for knee-jerk reactions.

7.56 pm

Sir John Stokes (Halesowen and Stourbridge): I know that a number of us have been here for many hours and must be tired; I shall therefore try to make my remarks as brief as possible.

I never listen to the Queen's Speech without marvelling at the continuity of English history, so unlike that of many other countries, and also rejoicing at the pageantry and symbolism which emphasise our roots in the past and our cohesion today in this kingdom. For all the political differences that are built into our parliamentary system, we are still one nation. What differences there are we settle here by discussion and argument and not, generally, by rioting in the streets. There is also still, except for a few regrettable cases, respect for the law of the land throughout the country.

The Gracious Speech ended with the customary wish for God's blessing on our counsels. That led me to think of the present spiritual state of the nation. We all hope for a strong moral lead from the new Archbishop of Canterbury. I also hope and pray that the next General Synod will not tear the Church of England to pieces with its enthusiasm to make women priests. It will certainly be necessary for the House to scrutinise most carefully any measures that come before it from the General Synod.

Despite what we heard about poverty in Northern Ireland, in most parts of England—certainly in the part of the world that I represent—there has been an enormous improvement in the standard of living of ordinary people in the past 20 years. I fear that that has led some to believe that heaven is with us here and now. In supermarkets £50 and £20 notes seem to be used all the time. Because of that feeling, some believe that there is not much need for the after-life about which people like Wesley used to preach when times were much harder in the 18th century.

In all walks of life I constantly meet very good people, but now, unfortunately there is some lowering of standards. There is some greed and materialism about, particularly in parts of the City of London and in a small section of industry, as witnessed in recent legal cases. I also encounter now, compared with some years ago, appallingly bad manners, particularly from some car drivers. Many of our towns and cities are still dreadfully disfigured by litter, dirt and graffiti. Nevertheless, taken all in all, and I travel a great deal, this is still the best country in the world in which to live. But we must continue to improve our environment.

I welcome the smaller number of substantial Bills in the Queen's Speech. I believe that the country longs for a period of good and steady government and better public services, and I am glad that those are emphasised in the Gracious Speech. In relation to those services, the country does not necessarily need more taxpayers' money; it needs better leadership and management at every level. There is a longing for law and order. The disgraceful prison disturbances some time ago and the recent riots in London should never have been allowed to happen.

As I have told successive Home Secretaries for many years, we shall never have a proper police force until we get back to the old system, as under Lord Trenchard, of a properly recruited and trained officer class. There is also a crying need for management in the health service, the post office and the railways where colonels' jobs are often done by corporals.

[Sir John Stokes]

We have heard much this afternoon about the threat of war in the Gulf. As Christians, we must hope that if there is to be war, it should be a just war. We heard a fluent speech from the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) who, as we know, is only human and has a strong built-in anti-United States bias. He said that war, if it came, would be all about oil.

It is true that oil certainly comes into the war, but many of us from both sides of the House think that the war is all about trying, for the first time since 1939, to stop aggression. We all know that if aggression had been stopped before 1939 there would not have been a world war. Now we have a simply marvellous opportunity with the Security Council, including Soviet Russia and even China, supporting a concerted effort to get the Iraqis out of Kuwait. That is a new and most important development in world history.

We all hope that the sanctions will become more and more successful. However, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield did not answer the question about what alternatives, except force, there would be if sanctions did not work. As we know, Saddam is not willing to negotiate or leave Kuwait. That places our leaders in a difficult position. There is an absolute necessity for Kuwait to be repossessed and compensated for the wrong done, but I also hope that soon after that the problem of Israel will be settled at last, once and for all, with Israel withdrawing from the occupied territories and having its boundaries recognised by all Arab nations. I am glad that that was mentioned in the Gracious Speech.

I know that this country has sent the cream of its armed forces to the Gulf. From my recent experience in the United States, I believe that the American forces there are better led, trained and fitter than they were in Vietnam some years ago, and are all professional soldiers, not conscripts.

There has been some controversy, in which I have recently been involved, about the behaviour of some of the families of hostages and some hostages. No one can be so unfeeling as not to appreciate the dreadful position in which those people find themselves. I drew attention to the fact that some of them, not all, have appeared on television in an emotional state with the apparent object of changing not only British foreign policy but United Nations policy —to weaken the united resolve and in some way deal with Saddam. They wonder how, if that is not done, any progress can be made.

I was pleased that today my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence said that they were proud of most of the hostages. Only a minority of people have appeared on television and behaved in what I regard as an unsuitable way. Many of us have known grief—I certainly have—and when it occurs it is best expressed in private, not on television. Those were the perfectly fair points that I was trying to make.

Today's debate has been mainly about Europe and its future. We heard a most remarkable speech from the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). It was one of the best speeches that I have heard in my 20 years here and certainly one of the best from him. I hope he will forgive me if I say that it seemed like a speech from a good old-fashioned Tory.

There have recently been unseemly differences in the EEC about the Uruguay round of trade negotiations and farm prices. There has been extraordinary humbug spoken with some of the EC nations prattling about unity, the unified nations and federalism, while not agreeing at all on fundamental matters and risking fearful trouble with the United States. That smacks of humbug. I meet the Governments, representatives, and peoples of Europe on a regular basis so I know what I am talking about. We must remember that our history, background, laws and way of doing things are different from those on the continent. In France, there was the dreadful, appalling revolution with the frightful sacrifice of innocent people and then the shameful episode of extensive collaboration with the Germans during the German occupation. We all know about Hitler's excesses in Germany. Both those countries are now quite different and I am in favour of the strongest co-operation with European nations. I believe, as de Gaulle did, in a Europe of nation states. I also believe in making the EEC work, but we must look carefully at the small print and to what we are to be committed.

We do not want this ancient assembly to be reduced to the status of a parish council. We do not want fundamental changes made with our money, trade, factories, life or details of our life by bureaucrats in Brussels, however well-intentioned or well-paid. We must change the system before we get in with them. That is perfectly sensible, and that debate is becoming more and more known. A number of nations, particularly the smaller ones, very much agree with us about that.

Another problem facing the Government is the increase in Government expenditure. The Opposition appear to think that the more taxpayers' money that is spent, the better. But the more taxpayers' money that is spent, the less there is for the private sector which pays for everything and on which we all depend. I fear that the Government will find it hard this year—we shall hear tomorrow—to control expenditure at the same time as reducing inflation.

In my view, there is a recession—we must call it so. I know that because of what is happening in the factories of the west midlands. Fortunately, however, it is a much less serious recession than that of the early 1980s; fortunately, too, companies now are much more efficient, much fitter and much more able to cope. I hope and pray that the recession will be short, and I look forward after Christmas to a further reduction in interest rates.

Most of what is in the Queen's Speech is wise and will be well thought of by the public. I welcome the determination to make fathers pay for their children, and to strengthen family ties in whatever way we can. One of the most appalling social problems facing the nation is the enormous number of divorces and the huge and growing number of illegitimate children, with all the worry, sadness and expense that they cause.

I also welcome the Government's firm stand against terrorism and their intention to replace and, I hope, to strengthen existing anti-terrorist legislation. The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) said that we must not have only an anti-IRA policy: we must have a general policy. Of course we must, but unless we beat the IRA there can be no future for Northern Ireland.

I said some time ago that I was slightly worried that some politics was being talked in pubs. I am afraid that there is still a little talk, although less than there was. There is too much criticism, too much in the newspapers, and too much examining of ourselves and looking at our entrails

every few hours. There are too many news bulletins. One must get on with life and not take one's temperature all the time. I blame the press and the media—the BBC and the other television companies—for all the unnecessary fuss about the leadership of my party. It is damaging not only to my party but to the nation. If some of my colleagues are foolish enough to want to stand against the Prime Minister, let them come out and say so. Let us hear their names and know who they are instead of having these grey men pushed forward like dummies.

I have seen quite a bit of life in peace and war. I know something of men and women and I have enough sense to know—I had it long before she was our leader—that our Prime Minister is an outstanding person in this country and throughout the world. Criticism of her is mostly extremely unfair. I am certain as time goes on that she will both remain our leader and win the next general election.

8.14 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): The hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge (Sir J. Stokes) is one of the characters in the House. When I first came here, the main Tory character was Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Walter Bromley-Davenport, who I believe died recently and to whom the hon. Gentleman is a worthy successor. We are used to the hon. Gentleman's extravagent remarks, but I think that it would have been appropriate if he had apologised for his remarks about the families of the hostages. He said that grief should be private. That may or may not be so, but the hon. Gentleman should understand the deep grief and anxiety of families who do not know whether they will see their loved ones again. The hon. Gentleman should, on reflection, have withdrawn his remarks.

The hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge is often referred to as the Member for the 17th century, but he displayed one very 20th century feature today. However much he may criticise the media, he likes to get his bit of publicity, and he is well aware of the likely impact of his closing remarks.

It would be hypocritical to deny that the considerable disarray in which the Government find themselves causes the Opposition a certain amount of satisfaction. When Governments are in that position, it would be odd if the Opposition were not pleased. Outside the Chamber, Tory Members are talking not so much about the Queen's Speech but about the intense factional fighting in their ranks. If, as the Prime Minister continually claims, there has been and is no difference between her and the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), why did he resign? We know from the newspapers how he was treated in the past 12 months—the petty humiliations, the pin pricks and so on. We know of the contempt in which the Prime Minister held the man who had at least the title of deputy Prime Minister. It is unfortunate that a Prime Minister should treat a Cabinet colleague in that way.

It is no secret that the Opposition—and, I imagine, a good number of Conservative Members—believe that two civil servants, Mr. Charles Powell and Mr. Bernard Ingham, have far more influence over the Prime Minister than has any member of the Cabinet. I am sure that no Conservative Member would deny that there is a kitchen Cabinet of tremendous power. It might be said that we should not attack those who cannot defend themselves. Perhaps that is so, but it is surely the abuse of the power that they have been given by the Prime Minister which leads us to mention these two particular civil servants.

I hope that the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) will not mind my saying—I cannot be doing his reputation much good by saying it—that I much admired the courage that he showed last year. This may be regarded as mischief-making, but I would say the same if it happened in my party. The hon. Gentleman stood against the Prime Minister knowing that he had no chance and that he might be subjected to all sorts of smear campaigns. He took his courage in his hands and faced the onslaughts of his constituency party—onslaughts which he probably guessed would come. All that takes courage, and we need courage in this House.

There is a great difference between the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West and the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who says all sorts of things but keeps on saying at the last moment that he has no intention of standing against the Prime Minister. Yet everyone knows that the right hon. Gentleman is determined to become leader of the Tory party at the first opportunity, although whether he will do so after the events of last week remains to be seen.

The Queen's Speech refers to improving
"the working of the economy",
but the hon. Member for Halesowen and Stourbridge was honest enough to admit that we are in a recession. It is certainly hitting the west midlands. The hon. Gentleman said that it did not have the same impact as the one of 10 years ago, and he is right—so far. But 10 years ago there was devastation in the west midlands and the black country—I notice the hon. Gentleman nodding in agreement. In the past fortnight three firms in my constituency have announced that they are to close. We are again facing plant closures and large-scale redundancy, with all the hardship that that entails.

Instead of being assisted to face the even stronger competition that will undoubtedly occur from 1992 onwards, industry is being penalised by high interest rates and an economic climate that is not at all conducive to the much-needed revival of British industry. How many more firms in the west midlands, the very heartland of manufacturing industry, will close in the next six or 12 months? How many more redundancies will there be? The reference in the Gracious Speech to improving the working of the economy is nonsense.

The Gracious Speech also talks about improving the quality of health and social services. One of the reasons for the Government's deep unpopularity is the way in which the national health service has been underfunded during the Government's lifetime. Conservative Members are not likely to nod in approval of that, but they know it as well as I do. We have seen ward closures and lengthening waiting lists and there is a perception among ordinary people that the Government have no enthusiasm for the NHS. That is why poll after poll has shown that the electorate has no confidence in the Government's handling of the NHS.

Opting out is nonsense. The district general hospital in my borough is obviously within the structure of the national health service. Why should it come out of that management structure? Why are people not allowed to have a say about whether it should come out? My borough council organised an opportunity for people to express their views. There was an overwhelming majority against

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opting out, but the Government seem to have taken no notice whatever. The unions in the Manor and Groscote hospitals organised ballots among the staff and, again, there were large majorities against what are described as self-governing trusts. The consultants were the only people allowed by the health authority to vote and 30 of them, I understand, voted against while 12 were in favour. Where is there any kind of mandate for the Government to go ahead and allow the district general hospital in my borough to opt out? I hope that the Government will not proceed with that, because it would be in defiance of the wishes of ordinary people who have clearly expressed their view.

There is no mention at all of housing in the Gracious Speech. I do not know about the experiences of Conservative Members, but most of the people who come to see Labour Members and those who write to us are concerned about housing. The problem is clear. People who are not able to afford a mortgage and could not do so even if the interest rate was much lower have nowhere to live, and that will continue unless they can be provided with public rented accommodation. Under the Government, even the number of houses built by housing associations has declined. The response of Ministers is always the same. They say that there will be a revival of the privately rented sector. What revival? I agree that some such accommodation has appeared on the market, but look at the rents that are being asked. If people could afford such rents they could get a mortgage in the first place.

It is wrong and unjust that a relatively large section of the community which is not in a position to buy should be penalised and forced to live in totally unsatisfactory accommodation either in bedsits or with parents or in-laws. I have said before and make no apology for repeating that people who come to my surgery, let alone those who write, plead with me to do something to help them. Many of them have children. I write to the local authority, but it has a long waiting list. Because of Government policy, no council accommodation has been built in the borough for more than 11 years. That is the picture all over Britain; it is normal. Why should such people be penalised? What crime have they committed? They are not able to buy property and, therefore, have to wait years before there is any chance of accommodation. When accommodation is offered it is usually a flat, and families with even two children who live in flats have a very remote chance of a transfer to a council house. Those are the domestic problems that we face and they are certainly not being solved by the Government.

On the subject of the middle east, it will come as no surprise to anyone, and certainly not to any of my hon. Friends, to know that I loathe war as much as anyone. When I spoke in the House about the invasion of Kuwait I said that sanctions should be allowed time to work and that if they did not work force would have to be used, although I hoped that that would be with the authorisation of the United Nations. As I said in an intervention, there has not been the slightest indication since the invasion of 2 August that the criminal regime in Iraq has any intention of withdrawing from Kuwait.

Some people say that we should negotiate and send the Foreign Secretary. For what purpose? Almost daily we are told that Kuwait is the 17th province of Iraq and that it must remain so for ever. What is there to negotiate about or what purpose would be served? The regime of Saddam Hussein clearly has no intention of withdrawing. Whether sanctions will in time do the trick remains to be seen.

I am not Johnny-come-lately to these matters. Some of my hon. Friends may ask why Tory Members were not concerned about the criminal regime in Iraq before 2 August. I certainly was. On 5 April I had an Adjournment debate in which I was assisted by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). I think that he and I have different views about what should be done about the invasion of Kuwait. On 5 April, following the execution of a journalist in Iraq, I spoke about the terror and the atrocities occurring in Iraq. I referred to the slaughter of Kurds in March 1987, the gassing, which was a crime against humanity. The Government did not seem to take much notice, any more than they took much notice of the crimes committed by the military in Argentina before the invasion of the Falklands. Many Labour Members, including me, were very worried about the situation in Iraq before the invasion occurred.

The criminal regime in Iraq has committed untold numbers of crimes against its own people and it has invaded Kuwait. All the reports show, and certainly the Amnesty International report confirms, that there has been outright terror in Kuwait. Can we be surprised at that? If Saddam Hussein carries out such crimes and atrocities against his own people, why should there be surprise when such terrible crimes are committed in Kuwait?

I agree with those who say that we should resolve other problems in the middle east. I have said before that I certainly want to see a solution for the Palestinians. I repeat that if the Jews have a right to a state of their own —which they have—the Palestinians have the same right. The Palestinian problem will not go away. However, the tension between Israel and the Palestinians is not an excuse for inaction by the international community over Kuwait. The criminal regime must be forced out of that country. If that can be done by sanctions enabling us to avoid war no one will be happier than I. However, I cannot and will not rule out the use of force. It would be a crime not only against the people of Kuwait but against international order if we concluded that we must accept the status quo.

The Government are tired and demoralised and they have lost the country's confidence. There is much speculation about whether the election will be next year or in 1992. No doubt the Government will cling on to the bitter end, rather like the Government elected in 1959 who went on to the last moment in 1964. It will not make any difference. This is a Government who have lost the confidence of the electorate and who should leave office. They will not do so; they will cling on to office, but there is every sign that they will be defeated at the hustings and be replaced by a Labour Government.

8.30 pm

Sir Anthony Meyer (Clwyd, North-West): One of the compensations for the rather disjointed debate that we have on the first day of our debate on the Queen's Speech is that it gives hon. Members the opportunity to step out of character. I am not accusing the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) of doing that, but he has stepped out of the stereotype that is the generally held view

of him among Conservative Members. I thank him for his kind remarks about me, but I assure him that I do not intend to sip twice from the poisoned chalice.

Talking of stepping out of character or stereotype, the remarkable speech of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) was an even more dramatic demonstration of his advance towards the Conservative Benches than anything we have had before. I was only sorry that the Prime Minister was not present to nod her vigorous assent to every word that he uttered, as she invariably does to every word uttered on this topic by the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore).

I deeply regret the departure from the Government of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe). His resignation gravely weakens the Government. It diminishes the respect in which the House is held. He is a major loss and I very much hope that we will not see rumbling into action the propaganda machine that has already convinced us that the Government's economic troubles stem from the tenure of 11 Downing street by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). He was regarded as a brilliant Chancellor and unassailable, but he is now branded as the author of all our misfortunes. I have a nasty feeling that the same process will be put to work against my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East, to whom my party, the Government and the country owe so much.

My right hon. and learned Friend wrote a brilliant article in the magazine *International Affairs*, the Chatham House publication. That was the occasion of the difference with the Government which led to his decision to resign. He set out the role of this country in Europe and the part that national sovereignty should play. Together with the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor, my right hon. and learned Friend has defined a policy towards Europe for this party and our Government. It not only unites the Conservative party but takes with it the majority of the Labour party, as well as pretty well the whole of the Liberal Democrats.

It is a policy of British involvement in everything that happens in the European Community, taking our full part in it, alway being present, seeking to deflect it when it runs in directions that we consider harmful to our national interest, to slow it down when it seems to be going faster than we can accommodate, but always going with the stream of European developments. That policy unites the Conservative party and commands widespread support across the Floor of the House.

There is an alternative policy. It is one which the Prime Minister, when she ceases to be Dr. Jekyll and becomes Mr. Hyde, seems occasionally to incline to, although there was little evidence of it in her speech today. It is an appeal to the anti-Europe, anti-foreigner sentiment that lies in the psyche of many British people. Such a policy, based on dislike of Europe and everything that emanates from it, could win support from the *Daily Express* and *The Sun* and might even receive a ramshackle majority in the House. I very much hope that it would not be a majority that would include the right hon. Member for Devonport, but I am jolly sure that it would secure the support of the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney.

Such a policy, however temporarily attractive it might be, would split the Tory party from top to bottom and might, before long, also split the Labour party. It would be disastrous for the country and for Europe, and all the more disastrous for my party if it were seen, as it would be seen, as an attempt by the Prime Minister to bolster her leadership and improve her electoral prospects.

I am sure that the Prime Minister will make no attempt to use the Gulf crisis as a means of scaring off any challenge to her leadership or reversing the party's decline in the polls. President Bush stopped short, but only just, of exploiting the Gulf crisis to improve the chances of Republican candidates facing election. It is fortunate that the Prime Minister's tough stance and her declared readiness to approve the use of armed force to evict Saddam Hussein from Kuwait cannot be seen in any way as motivated by her desire to retain the leadership of or to turn the electoral tide for the Conservative party.

However, having said that, and being convinced that, if we do go to war in the Gulf to evict the Iraqis from Kuwait, it would be a just war, one has to recognise that that is not the same as saying that it would be a wise war. The consequences of a conflict of this sort in the middle east are impossible to predict. It would be wise to take careful note of what King Hussein of Jordan is saying about the possible fallout from a war such as this. Even if it were instantly successful, and Saddam Hussein were instantly evicted from Kuwait and toppled, what would pour into the vacuum thus created? It takes a fantastic degree of optimism to believe that this chain of events would lead to, or facilitate, a peaceful solution to the problems of the middle east.

I have no fault to find with the way in which the Prime Minister and the Government have conducted policy in the middle east up to now, although there have been occasions when I have regretted the extravagance of the Prime Minister's rhetoric about putting Saddam Hussein in chains. I doubt whether any hon. Member has any criticism of the Foreign Secretary or of the way in which he has handled this matter throughout. However, I am a little concerned that the course of the debate in the House may lead the Government to suppose that they now have an undisputed mandate to go to war. It looks to me as if the House has given that mandate. I am not yet convinced that the people have given any such mandate.

8.40 pm

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Much of the Queen's Speech is extremely predictable. There will be a little more privatisation and some more anti-social legislation, and Britain will descend further into a rather nasty, greedy, uncaring and grabbing society. That is what we have seen over the past 10 years. It is necessary only to step outside this place and to walk for about 10 minutes to see exactly the results of 10 years of Conservative Government. Young people are sleeping on the streets outside the Savoy hotel while inside there are people with money to burn. There are those who are paying £400 a night for bed and breakfast while on the streets people sleep in cardboard boxes. That is the epitome of the Government's achievements over the past 10 years.

Is the House aware of the many derelict, elderly men who try to get into Westminster hospital each night because they have nowhere to live? Is it aware also of the young people who queue outside Salvation Army hostels around London? Is there an awareness of the number of people who come to hon. Members' surgeries demanding their rights, including a roof over their heads, which we cannot provide for them? The borough in my constituency,

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like that of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), is building hardly any houses because there is no money to enable it to do so. There is plenty of money, however, for other purposes.

The social injustices that the Government have created will cause them to lose the next general election. The people will express a wish for a return to the concept of a welfare state that provides a safety net for everyone, with a health service that is free for everyone at the point of use. These are important issues and they will come to the forefront at the next general election.

There are important world issues that the House seldom discusses. Poverty in Britain and throughout the world is of overwhelming importance, as is environmental destruction here and around the world. Linked with these matters is the pressing issue of world peace, which, again, is seldom discussed in the House.

In the previous Session, the Government introduced the Environmental Protection Bill, which completed all its stages. It was laudable in the sense that it was designed to ensure that people would drop less litter and it provided for more recycling of goods. I could not disagree with those aims, but, unfortunately, the boat was missed entirely. The Bill did not deal with the basic issues. It did not focus on what we on the planet are doing and the environmental destruction that is inevitable unless there is a change of course and a change in our attitude towards the world's natural resources.

I shall quote from a Friends of the Earth document entitled "Feel the Heat". It was produced recently by Andrew Dilworth, Friends of the Earth's international officer. One passage reads:

"On current emission trends, the IPCC predicts a rate of temperature change of 0·3 °C per decade. This is 'greater than that seen over the past 10,000 years'. Some greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide and CFCs) stay in the atmosphere for long periods. To hold concentrations of these gases at their current levels 'would require immediate reductions in emissions from human activities of over 60%' . . . Obviously emissions cannot be cut by 60% overnight, but the challenge for politicians around the world now is to reduce emissions sufficiently to limit the amount of warming and the speed at which this occurs."

The Prime Minister speaks at every international conference on global warming that takes place anywhere in the world. I think that the right hon. Lady is the first Prime Minister that Britain has ever had who is scientifically qualified and who understands the importance of the issue. She understands what is happening, but the Government hold back on agreements on reducing the emission of greenhouse gases.

Mr. Sayeed: The hon. Gentleman has spoken of the past 10,000 years. Vines are no longer grown in York, but when the Romans were in York they grew vines. They made good wine there, and they did not get there by motor car.

Mr. Corbyn: That is a clever and witty argument. What the hon. Gentleman says is correct. Vines were grown in York and wine was produced there in Roman times. Many remnants of old vineyards are to be found on the south downs, which at one time was a more fertile area than now. There was a time when Britain had a warmer climate. Over the past 2,000 years there has been a climatic shift throughout the world.

Research has taken place in Antarctica and deep ice cores are able to produce an exact replica of what was in the world's atmosphere 1,000 to 2,000 years ago. There is incontrovertible evidence that carbon dioxide emissions are increasing at an unprecedented rate. Unless we are able to reduce them, the consequences will be truly horrendous. The central states of the United States will become desert areas, and so will large parts of the Soviet Union. Many countries will be lost through rising sea levels. Climatic changes will have devastating effects throughout the world. Half of Bangladesh will disappear because of rising sea levels. These are extremely serious issues and they can be tackled only by international agreement and only if we are prepared to make necessary changes in the running of our economy instead of treating the earth as something from which we can always dig things without worrying about the consequences.

I hope that the Government will show that they are giving serious consideration to these issues when they produce their environmental protection Bill this Session. Instead of trying to undermine the Antarctic treaty system by bringing forward proposals to allow mineral exploration, which many of my right hon. and hon. Friends believe will lead to mineral exploitation, they could make a good start by saying, "Enough is enough and we shall go no further. We shall continue to undertake scientific exploration, but we shall seek to preserve the ecology of the continent. We shall try to preserve the living organisms around it as well as the southern ocean, which is an important originator of oxygen into the atmosphere." I should like to think that the Government will change their heart and say at the Santiago conference that Britain will support a wilderness park in the Antarctic rather than continuing the mineral exploration.

The factors to which I have referred in the context of the world environment are crucial, but it must be recognised that the results of environmental destruction are different in different parts of the world. We complain, rightly, about the level of air pollution in London because of the amount of traffic and the lack of planning. The same complaints are made in other major cities. We complain also about toxic waste disposal and nuclear waste disposal. It is right that these complaints should be made.

It is true, unfortunately, that, in effect, we are exporting pollution to poorer parts of the world. That takes place in a dramatic form in the exporting of toxic waste to poor countries in west Africa. They accept it and process it because it is a way of obtaining foreign exchange. It is often processed badly, however, and that causes incalculable damage to those countries. Likewise, the drive to obtain foreign exchange has led to disaster in India, for example, in the form of the Bhopal accident some years ago. That sort of accident is repeated day after day throughout the poorest countries in the world. There is a clear link between poverty in the poorest countries in the world and environmental destruction, especially with the economic regime that the world is under at present.

The greatest single issue facing two thirds of the world's population is the debt that so many poor countries have to the banking system, primarily that of western Europe and the United States. Debt has grown enormously over the past 30 years and it is now over a trillion dollars. It has grown in part because commodity price increases have not taken place. In real terms, many farmers in poor countries are receiving less now than they were 30 years ago for tea, coffee, bananas and many minerals. At the same time,

interest rates have increased to higher and higher levels. The only way in which a poor country can stay afloat is by borrowing money, and that increases its indebtedness.

The gross national product of Mauritania, a poor African country, is $440 per head, while external debt per head is $7,071. It is inconceivable that Mauritania can ever repay its debt. It is impossible for that to be done. The gross national product of Zambia is $250 per head, while debt per head is $889. The effect of such debt in many countries has been an enforced invitation to the International Monetary Fund and the World bank to come in and make recommendations on how the economy should be run, and they have always proposed similar solutions. These have been to increase export earnings and the inflow of foreign investment by selling state assets and cutting social expenditure to the extent that in Bolivia, for example, the problems of the people are becoming worse, not better. We should be aware that 16·7 per cent. of all babies born in Bolivia die within a few months of their birth. In Peru, 34 per cent. of 12 to 17-year-old students do not attend schools or colleges because they have been closed on the orders of the World bank and the IMF, with the aim of running a market economy mirroring what the IMF thinks is right.

In our debates on overseas aid, it is always assumed that, by some means or another, the northern industrial countries automatically transfer resources to the poorer, predominantly southern countries. That is not true. The average figure for the real money that flows each year from the poorest to the richest in the world is $50 billion. It is a gigantic world economy that drags the resources and the wealth out of the poorest people in the poorest countries and feeds them into the banking systems of Europe and north America. When the Prime Minister talks about changing the trade arrangements and ensuring that the Uruguay GATT round reaches a successful conclusion, she is really talking about a free world market in food, which would be devastating for the poorest people in the poorest countries. She is talking not about protecting the poorest people in the poorest countries, but about their destruction.

I believe that the indebtedness of the United States Government directly led to the deaths of thousands of children throughout the world. It exported its economic problems to the poorest people in the poorest countries. We need to understand that a world imbalance leads to poverty, malnutrition, infant mortality and environmental destruction. The destruction of the rain forests in the Amazon has not necessarily come about because everybody in Brazil is hellbent on diving into the rain forests with an axe, a chain saw or a big skidder device for cutting down trees. It has happened partly because it is a way of increasing export earnings and the indebtedness of that country. Exactly the same process happened in Malaysia and west Africa. The economic strategy that the IMF pushes on to the poorer countries of the world means that we are financing the destruction of the rain forests and those who live in them. It is time that we woke up to that fact.

Politics in this country are dominated by debates about our relationship with Europe and the Eurocentralism that goes with that. I am firmly an internationalist, so I am not necessarily opposed to Europe. However, I am opposed to a fortress Europe that basically creates wealth for itself at the expense of the world, creates an undemocratic control of government for the whole of Europe, and, in truth, works only for the good of multinational corporations and banking systems. It will cause further imbalances in world poverty and world trade arrangements. I view the free market of 1992 not as an opportunity, but as a disaster for very many people throughout the world. I believe that Europe will contribute to the economic problems of the world.

I do not agree with the sort of racist nonsense that has been published in the *Sun* and other newspapers during the past few weeks. It is a disgusting way to report matters. However, I believe that the drive towards a market economy in Europe will create poverty on the rims of Europe and an inner-colonialism in which western Europe will act as a sort of colonial master for eastern Europe and much of the rest of the world. It is about time that we began to take an international and global view rather than shut ourselves into a Europe that does not act in a socially just and reasonable manner. I hope that the debate will now begin to turn on those matters.

The other issues that currently dominate our discussions are arms expenditure and the possibility of a Gulf war. This year, Britain will spend £20 billion on arms. I have never been a supporter of NATO. It was set up after the war partly because the United States wished to develop a much stronger economic interest in western Europe, which in turn largely led to the cold war. NATO was a product of the cold war. The Warsaw pact is at an end, so surely it is time to end NATO. Do we really need an alliance directed towards the supposed enemy of the Soviet Union when even the most virulent supporters of NATO agree that it is no longer any threat?

The cat came out of the bag during the debate on the defence estimates last Session, when speaker after speaker used the phrase "out of area activities by NATO"—in other words, beyond those agreed in the 1949 treaty. I am referring to the sort of activities currently taking place in the Gulf. In many ways, what has happened in the Gulf is disastrous. I have never been a supporter of or an apologist for Saddam Hussein. Indeed, I recall many lonely occasions in the House when I spoke against Saddam Hussein, his genocide against the Kurdish people and the way that the British Government were financing the re-arming of Iraq. Indeed, the chemical weapons being manufactured in Iraq largely comprise chemicals made in western Europe and north America. Some £1 billion was loaned to Saddam Hussein by British banks, with the agreement of the British Government. His power is largely the creation of western Europe and north America. I do not support him and I do not think that he was right to invade Kuwait.

I do not accept that either Kuwait or Saudi Arabia represents the zenith of democracy anywhere in the world. In Saudi Arabia women are denied the vote, while in Kuwait few people have the vote. There is a huge underclass of people from the third world doing the work and carrying out the economic activities. Those countries are feudal establishments. The only purpose of sending troops to the region is to defend and guarantee oil supplies. I find it difficult to accept that the United States is merely defending a small country against a larger country. If that were true, why were Grenada and Panama invaded? What was the Vietnam war about, other than a powerful United States wishing to extend its control and influence throughout the world?

There must be a negotiated settlement to the problems of the middle east. That means that the rights of the

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Palestinian and Kurdish peoples must be recognised. There can be no peace in the region until their rights are accepted. If it was good enough in 1918 for Woodrow Wilson to recognise the rights of the Kurdish people, why cannot those rights be recognised now? If the shooting starts and there is war in the Gulf, the retaking of Kuwait will not be a clean, clinical operation—it will be a filthy and long war with hundreds of thousands of dead, and at the end of that war there will still have to be negotiations on the future order and the future government of that area and those countries.

Before we begin shooting, before we let slip the dogs of war, we should pause and try every possible way to achieve a negotiated settlement that will bring peace to the region. Many people are wrapping themselves in the Union Jack and in khaki hoping that they will gain cheap support by pushing this country into war. I do not want a war. I do not want the working-class youth of Britain, the United States and Iraq killing each other in the deserts of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.

We live in remarkable times. We have the technology and the ability to achieve so much, but at present we are using that technology and that ability to maintain two thirds of the world's population in some degree of poverty, and to allow an unprecedented rate of environmental destruction of our own planet. At the same time, the Government are pledging themselves to the idea that the only salvation for all the world's needs is provided by market forces and voodoo economics. Those ideas have brought the world to its present plight, and created the current environmental destruction.

We need an understanding that there must be planned trade and planned production—production aimed at the needs of people rather than the wastefulness of the wealthy in western Europe and north America.

8.58 pm

Mr. Mark Wolfson (Sevenoaks): I hope that the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) will understand if I do not pursue his arguments; I wish to raise other matters. However, I must say that I profoundly disagreed with many of his remarks.

I wish to refer to two sentences in the Gracious Speech. The first states:

"My Government attach the highest priority to national security, and to the preservation of international peace with freedom and justice."

The second states:

"My Government will continue to uphold the purposes and principles of the United Nations."

In that context, I wish to raise a matter that is referred to relatively seldom in the House. It is the aspiration of the Baltic peoples—the populations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—to independence and freedom from the Soviet Union. During the summer, I had the opportunity to visit those three Baltic countries on a parliamentary human rights delegation, together with the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen) and the hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn). It is appropriate that I should raise this matter in the House today, because Mr. Lennart Meri—the Foreign Minister of the Republic of Estonia—has spent this week in London. I am glad to say that he met my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary earlier in the week, and this evening he addressed an all-party human rights group meeting in the House of Commons.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance to the Baltic people of such a meeting. For some 50 years, there has been a group of remarkable people in Britain—members of the British Baltic Council—who, through 50 years of Soviet domination of their countries, have kept alive the hope of their nations for ultimate freedom and independence.

Let me remind hon. Members that the population of Estonia is 1·5 million; 65 per cent. are Estonian, and the rest are mainly Russian. In Latvia, the population is 2·5 million: only 53 per cent. are native Latvians, the rest being Soviet citizens. In Lithuania the population is 3·4 million, 80 per cent. being Lithuanian. Those three countries are a totally different case from the other Soviet republics. They were occupied by the Soviet Union, and it is part of the second world war's unfinished business that they are still not independent.

This is a time of great change. We have just seen the post-war division of Germany come to an end. The Baltic people feel compelled to remind the rest of the world—and I wish to remind the House—that that reunification by no means spells the definitive end of world war two. Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians are still victims of that war, and the Soviet-occupied Baltic states are still an unresolved consequence of the second world war. However, their Governments clearly state that they are bound to Europe—a wider Europe than just the Community—by common bonds of culture, heritage and history. Their aspiration is that they should be enabled to take their rightful place in a united Europe.

The Baltic states want equal rights for European security and co-operation; they want to assume their own responsibilities as members of the commonwealth of free nations—as, indeed, they once did during their 18 years of full independence between 1920 and 1939. The specific request, to which they want a response now, is that they should be given observer status at the forthcoming Paris conference on security and co-operation in Europe. It is essential that the west gives what encouragement it can to the resolution of a matter which has to be settled between the Soviet Union and the Baltic republics.

But it is equally important that, with all the other major issues in the world today, so many of which have been referred to during this debate, we do not allow the position of the Baltic states to be forgotten by the free world, or allow our wish for Mr. Gorbachev's success in the Soviet Union to override the importance of pressing the Soviets and reminding them that their occupation of the Baltic states is illegal and has been so recognised by all British Governments since the war.

The record of all British Governments is clear on that issue, but we need to turn that recognition into reality now that the opportunity for their independence exists. They must not be swamped by the wider issues of the break-up of the other Soviet socialist republics from the centre because, I emphasise again, their position is very different.

The Danish Foreign Minister has said that Denmark supports the efforts of the Baltic republics to give real content to their formal independence. He hopes that, before long, they will take responsibility as fully fledged participants in international co-operation.

The Icelandic Foreign Minister recently told the United Nations General Assembly that independence is the only

solution to the dispute between Moscow and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. He said that those three republics, whose independent statehood has been recognised by the international community, should now become a reality.

We hon. Members who visited those republics this summer were enormously impressed by not only the realism of Ministers and others whom we met there, but by their dedication and commitment to achieving independence. It is their only real hope for building up a more vigorous and effective economy. If they remain part of the enormously complex Soviet economy, it will be even more difficult for them to raise their living standards and establish the trading and manufacturing links with the west that they so badly need. As small independent nations they had an effective record of economic development in the years between the wars. Their people have skills and abilities and they can feed themselves. The Scandinavian nations are clear examples of how small populations can achieve high living standards, running their economies in a western mould, and there is no reason why the Baltic states should not do the same.

Therefore, I appeal to my party in government to make every effort to give encouragement and support to the correct and proper aspirations of the Baltic people for independence.

9.8 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I do not propose to follow the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Wolfson) all the way to Latvia, Estonia or even Lithuania. I shall stay within Europe or, as it is more popularly referred to in the context that I am talking about, the Common Market.

I found the Queen's Speech curiously disappointing. In some ways, the Queen would have done better to have recorded it on an 0896 number and let us all ring in to hear it. She could have stayed at home and not bothered to come through all the traffic. The speech was not up to the trappings. It was rather like Woolworth's used to be before the war with everything neatly laid out and nothing costing more than sixpence. It presented a series of measures dredged up from the Whips' cupboard which are of no great importance, and which will be easy to jettison in a cut-and-run general election. As a menu for the new Session, it will produce a very disappointing meal.

The Session will be preoccupied with Europe and the Common Market, which are confusing and frustrating issues because both parties are split over them. Government Members are clearly split over Europe from top to bottom. If I am to be honest, I must admit that our party, too, is split—although it split more from bottom to bottom than from top to bottom, because the split exists at my level and is less important because it is the Government who must make the decisions.

The Prime Minister's problem is that she understands the Common Market only retrospectively. She agrees to a measure such as the Single European Act and then regrets it at her leisure. In the constant process of inwardly, downwardly pulsating, in getting closer to Europe, there is never a line to stand on. The Prime Minister has no line, and nor have her supporters in the Conservative party—specifically the members of the Bruges group, who always say, "Thus far, and no further", until they receive the next nudge down the road, at which point they lunge forward and repeat, "Thus far, and no further".

Many more measures and pulls have yet to come from the Common Market. I note that its tone towards us has changed from, "Come on; be in; share the decision-making and influence the decisions," to, "Come in, or you will be left behind and we shall go ahead without you." We shall be dragged willy-nilly, struggling and resisting, but always getting the worst of all worlds, into a deeper relationship. The Common Market will pull at us, and the Ministers in the white coats will take the Prime Minister by each arm and pull her with them in that remorseless process.

The Opposition, by their concurrence and actual advocacy of the exchange rate mechanism and European monetary union, will make matters easier for the Government, by giving them an opportunity to steal our clothes with every advance that they make into Europe. So it will go on, with the Prime Minister left bemused, and the public left confused.

We seek to repair the damage that has been caused by Britain's membership of the Common Market by achieving closer and deeper integration into that institution. Let there be no doubt that we have suffered massive industrial damage. A trade surplus in 1970 of about £4 billion at 1989 prices has turned into a deficit of £16 billion, and 98 per cent. of our world deficit is with the Common Market. That turnround of about £20 billion has been caused by exporting at least 1·5 million jobs to Europe. That is the cause of our industrial and unemployment difficulties.

In addition, we are forced to accept an agricultural protection system that increases food prices in Britain, cuts off our natural trade associations, and introduces distortion into our relationship with developing countries. We are compelled to pay for the damage thus sustained with a contribution that is now running at £2·3 billion net. All that for a country that has a massive foreign trade deficit.

It seems pointless to seek further strengthening of a relationship that has already caused so much harm. That harm has been done because we never had a clear idea of our interests. They are not sovereign but economic interests. Britain needs to rebuild, widen and expand the industrial base on which the paraphernalia of an advanced industrial society rests—services, the financial sector and jobs. That base creates not only employment but the surplus for growth and for public spending, and pays our way in a world in which our deficit is in tradeable goods.

We cannot continue to consume at this rate unless we produce to pay for consumption. Quite simply, our problem is that the industrial base, on which everything rests, has shrunk to the point where it is barely viable; it can barely support the superstructure of an advanced society. It is a telling point that our industrial manufacturing rate is now about 20 per cent. as a proportion of gross domestic product, compared with 30 per cent. in West Germany and Japan. That difference is crucial, as it is the difference between success and failure.

Unless the industrial base is rebuilt it will be impossible for any Government to advance living standards, improve the lot of the people, improve public spending and so generate the standards, the well-being and the health and education services that are required by an advanced industrial society. We will be faced with the problem of cutting back—cutting our coat to suit meaner cloth—unless we can expand and rebuild that base.

[Mr. Austin Mitchell]

The industrial base is effectively weakened by the wider unities. It is not the same for a weak economy entering into wider unities as it is for a strong economy. A strong economy, such as that of West Germany, can power through the burdens, difficulties and problems, but we succumb to them because our industrial base is weaker.

Essentially, the Common Market is a forum for competition between national economies—a competition which we are losing. It is not a machinery for giving aegrotats or for lending support to failures, but a forum for intensified competition.

The market weakens its peripheries: the logical process is to attract development to the centres of population. As the market does that we face a choice. As a weakened peripheral country our interests lie in strengthening central institutions so that they can begin the work of redistribution. The problem is that the West German economy, powerful though it is, is looking east and will not be prepared to pay for the sort of redistribution network that would be necessary to give us benefits from stronger central institutions. If that is not available our only alternative is to act for ourselves, to pursue our own interests and build up a strong industrial base. Primarily, that means retaining essential powers to control our exchange rates, interest rates, budget policy, and money supply.

The exchange rate is absolutely crucial to the process of securing our competitiveness and to rebuilding the industrial base. We have entered an exchange rate mechanism which is in any case a folly, because it is pointless to gear economic policy to a fixed exchange rate. The exchange rate is simply a market clearing mechanism. To try to gear economic policy to that is as sensible as trying to control the weather by nailing the needle on the barometer—it is as daft as that. Yet, that is what we have undertaken to do by joining the exchange rate mechanism and especially by joining at an overvalued exchange rate.

The real exchange rate against the deutschmark is now about 22 or 23 per cent. up on the second half of 1986 and it is more than 50 per cent. higher against the dollar. Imagine the problem that that causes for industries competing in the German or American markets. Our industry has a 23 per cent. or a 50 per cent. hurdle to leap before it can even restore the competitive situation to what it was at the end of 1986. It is an impossible job and it cannot be done. Industry is being forced to break itself in an effort to do something which is impossible in the first place.

Overvaluation of the pound is the cause of our deficit. The pound must come down substantially if we are to compete and close such a deficit. Overvaluation is the cause of our failure to export sufficient goods. It also leads to too many imports. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) gave statistics which showed that the decline in the proportion of gross domestic product in terms of exports between 1979 and 1990 is about 3·5 per cent. That has not happened in France. Its share of exports, in terms of GDP, has increased. It has not happened in Germany, either. That is the test of failure. Our exports fail because of overvaluation. Until we reduce that overvaluation and become competitive in terms of exchange rates, we shall be unable to survive.

Industry is being asked to hold its wage costs, but industry is not responsible for inflation. The wages of workers in manufacturing industry have gone up less every year than the wages of those who work in every other sector of the economy. However, industry is told to cut its costs, squeeze labour and to jettison research, development and investment, although they are all necessary if industry is to survive. It has been told to make itself lean and trim in order to over-leap the 23 per cent. burden that was imposed by the Government's decision to go into the exchange rate mechanism at an overvalued exchange rate.

Industry cannot do it. It means, in effect, shelling our front-line troops. Our manufacturing industry is in close competition with the manufacturing sectors of other economies. However, it is to be clobbered by bankruptcies, increases in unemployment and by the squeeze and deflation that the Government have introduced and which they will strengthen as a result of the overvalued exchange rate.

Just as happened between 1979 and 1981, there will be closures. Our lack of competitiveness now is the same as it was then. The exchange rate is as high in real terms as it was then. The terms of trade are as bad as they were then. Exactly the same process is taking place as happened in 1925 when Winston Churchill took sterling back to the gold standard at an overvalued rate. The consequences will be exactly the same as they were then because the advice that the Government are giving to management is exactly the same as it was then: cut your wage costs. It cannot be done. Businesses will go to the wall. Our front-line troops will be shelled in the struggle for industrial survival.

Winston Churchill said then that he wished that industry were more content and finance less proud. Entry into the exchange rate mechanism, particularly at that level of overvaluation, is the final triumph of the City and the financial sector. They have triumphed over industry. The City and finance want ERM because they want to become the financial centre for Europe. That is why they were so keen that this country should join the ERM. That, too, is why they are so keen on economic and monetary union. They want to be the manipulators of money for Europe.

By doing so under those conditions and at that rate the Government have imposed a ruinous burden on the manufacturing sector, which is vital to our economy. Industry will be further weakened. Deflation is the enemy of the improvement of everything. The City has won. It is impossible to expand the economy; it has to be deflated if we are to get down to West German levels of inflation. We are entering into the same long-term deflation as France and Italy went through. The result will be the same rise in unemployment. Economic and monetary union would make it even worse. A balance of payments gap will be replaced by a standards gap and by the need to cut wages and costs even more in order to stay competitive.

The prospect is gloomy indeed. We are locked into a wind-down and we cannot break out of it. We are locked into the old lurching process of stop-go. This is the last stop; there will be no more go. We cannot expand the economy. We cannot control or manage the exchange rate.

Market forces would help a country that had endured a period of overvaluation. As the oil resources ran out, as the underpinning was removed and as the balance of payments made its effects felt on the exchange rate, the pound would come down. Market forces would bring it down. They cannot now operate because the pound is

pegged in the exchange rate mechanism. We shall be reduced to the same relationship to Europe as Northern Ireland has to the United Kingdom.

We shall have closures and bankruptcies. They are going on now. I do not think that the Government understand the damage that they are doing to the real economy and to the manufacturing base of this nation. It is a national disaster. The only consolation is that they will be thrown out of power as a result. They might be able to save themselves by an Australian solution. I am not referring to the merger of Sky and BSB, although the Australians have a shrewder gut instinct and a cruder grasp of issues than the English with all their mock gentility. I am referring to the solution adopted in extremis by Australasian political parties. It was adopted by the Liberals in Australia and the Labour party in New Zealand when they junked a failing leader and brought in a glamorous alternative. Fortunately for us, the Government will not do that because the failing leader is too tough, the party is too nerveless and the glamorous alternative lacks the guts. He is

"Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike".

The Government are stuck with the Prime Minister and locked on the path of decline and electoral disaster. We will come to power but I am afraid that it will not be the sort of power I would have wanted. We have had a miserable 11 years in opposition seeing every balance shifted to meanness, wealth and selfishness—towards the better-off and away from the people and the causes that I represent and want to see prosper. I want to come to power with the ability to put that right and shift the balances back. I want to come to power with a Government who can begin to rebuild the industrial heart of the nation so that we can obtain the expansion that we need to improve the quality of life and the services that are important to the people. Altruism and a sense of community flourish in a wealthier society. We have to generate that wealth and that is the first responsibility of a Labour Government.

I do not want to come to power to endure again the miserable experience of 1964 to 1967 of jettisoning everything that the party believes in to maintain an untenable and indefensible exchange rate at the behest of somebody else.

9.27 pm

Mr. Alan Haselhurst (Saffron Walden): In a slimline Queen's Speech, I am pleased to see that the question of compensation for the compulsory purchase of land will be addressed again. I am sure that it is right to examine whether we have got the balance between developer and dispossessed person as right and fair as it should be. I speak from some experience, as I have a major public works development—an airport—in my constituency. I have seen the effects of that. It could be said that the British Airports Authority was generous in its approach to land owners. Nevertheless, it was not able to go as far as ensuring that some of the gain coming from land taken for something such as an airport is shared by the person whose land it was. We have now to look at this again to ensure that we achieve a more equitable arrangement.

It will be more costly to achieve those developments, but I think that it may make it easier to carry them out if those whose land has to be taken in the national interest —as perceived by the Government of the day—are given at least some reasonable reward for the fact that they are losing something precious to them and which has perhaps been an important staple of their life.

We are also intending to introduce legislation to deal with teachers' pay and conditions. I welcome that. Clearly, it has been a source of discontent within the teaching profession that they have not had negotiating machinery. I was not convinced that negotiation was absolutely essential, provided that there was a system of salary determination in place which recognised the importance of teachers in society. I said to teachers who asked for the return of their negotiating rights, "What is wrong with a pay review body if it could deal with the problem?" The system, which will come before the House, restores an element of negotiation and I hope that it will be well supported by all parties, not just political parties, so that we can put sensible arrangements in place.

It would be remiss of me if I did not say to my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that if we are to have a decent framework of negotiation for teachers' salaries we must also have sufficient resources to ensure that we extinguish those last feelings of discontent in the profession. Teachers still feel that they are undervalued, particularly in areas such as mine where living costs are extremely high. I hope that with this machinery we can find a flexible system which will enable us both to have all the qualified teachers that we need and to ensure that their morale is high and they have their rightful status.

I am pleased to see the commitment to continue to work for the regeneration of our cities. My interest in that stems from my chairmanship of the trustees of the Community Projects Foundation which is supported through the voluntary services unit of the Home Office. The Government do not make as much as they could of having such an organisation on their books. We have developed a body of skill and professionalism which could be used to greater effect in the regeneration of our inner cities. We already have some input, but it could be greater. The concern must be not just to refurbish buildings, streets and neighbourhoods, but to ensure that the living environment and the way in which the community works is effective, constructive and right for people, not just something pleasant to look at. Community development can go hand in glove with renovation and it should be a better fit than it may have been so far.

I am sorry that, alongside the commitment to continue with the regeneration of our cities, there is not a similar commitment to the regeneration of our rural areas. That is in the forefront of the minds of my constituents. We have achieved a European Community position on agricultural subsidies, but, as the Prime Minister has admitted, the Community still goes into the GATT negotiations in a weak negotiating position. We may not be able to come out of those negotiations with the deal that we should like and that has serious implications not only for our farmers, but for the whole rural community.

If we are to make sense of agriculture, we must develop new means of managing the countryside. We must find a way of leading farmers away from simply being producers of food and towards being full-time custodians of the countryside. That seems to be the only attractive, practical way in which their skills, expertise and love of the countryside can be put to work.

The changes that may necessarily come about because of the changes in agricultural support and the outcome of the trade talks have great implications for the countryside.

[Mr. Alan Haselhurst]

I hope that besides the measures mentioned in the Gracious Speech we shall recognise the need to support the changes in the countryside. We no more want a derelict countryside than we want derelict towns and cities.

I want to concentrate my remarks on that part of the Gracious Speech that refers to a constructive contribution to the intergovernmental conferences on economic and monetary union and the Community institutions. How we conduct our relations with Europe now has added political significance. I do not believe there is much doubt, however, that the argument about our membership of the EC was settled in 1983. The election that year was fought on the issue of continued membership of the Community and the result was decisive. Since then the Labour party has been easing itself back into the modern world, doubtless helped by its leader who now likes to believe that he has been constant in his support, nay enthusiasm, for the ideals of the EC.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Just like the Prime Minister.

Mr. Haselhurst: We did not join a static entity. There might be plenty of scope for argument about how far and how fast development within the EC should take place, but it was always clear that the process promised ever-closer union of European peoples. Whether that union was arrived at by inching our way forward or by taking great strides was left to succeeding politicians and others to determine. If there was doubt about that commitment it was surely removed when we went into the negotiations that led to the Single European Act, which simply underlines what the Community is all about.

Two intergovernmental conferences are shortly to be held, which are another stage along the road towards closer union. I do not imagine for one moment that those conferences represent the final stages of that union—they are simply a means of considering further ways in which to move forward. Many years will elapse before any finality or perfection in our arrangements for the Community is likely to be achieved.

It is important to know the mood of the British people as the background to our approach to Community affairs. I believe that there is a general assent to our continued involvement in a developing Community. Perhaps not everyone understands the details and the implications, but there is a general assent to the fact that we are a member of the Community and that it is not a static body, but one which is evolving towards closer co-operation and perhaps even something called union. I do not believe that the people want the Government to cause the country to turn its back on those developments. There is a will to go on even if people are unsure exactly where we are going. The concept of Europe acting in a more united way attracts rather than repels our fellow countrymen.

Admittedly, I do not represent a constituency such as Newham, South and I know that the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) has different views from me on this subject. It may be that every second constituent he meets has a furrowed brow and asks questions about the composition and powers of the European central bank. Perhaps such questions influence his views on this subject. However, I know that I am not getting letters from constituents who are worried about economic and monetary union, the development of the Community institutions or even political union. I may get plenty of letters about the welfare of horses and ponies as a result of negotiations for the harmonisation of standards from the European Community, but on the more strategic issues there is hardly a letter. At constituency meetings, I am chided more about an apparent reluctance by the country to co-operate more closely with the European Community and a worry about Britain's possible isolation if such co-operation is not shown. I do not believe that a brake is being put on what the Government are trying to do. People in my constituency are worried about the country's reluctance to go forward, not about over-enthusiasm.

The general support that may be expressed for the Community is not a green light for everything to be done without qualification or a sign that the Government can sign up for anything. When people come to focus on details, it is possible that the mood will change. When we agreed to go into the European Community, I do not know whether people believed that we were going to be faced with the idea of a common currency, but I hardly think that it is a burning issue in the country. I have not received letters stating that we cannot contemplate that at any cost. As I go around the country I have not noticed that the bridges over our motorways are daubed with slogans, "Save Sterling—Save our Pound". If that is the test of the strength of public feeling, arguably there is still more interest in whether a certain Mr. G. Davis was innocent or guilty. As yet, there is no motorway built in the direction of Southend, but if there were, we might see such slogans—I do not know.

Far from there being any outbursts of anger, I detect a strong undercurrent of support for the idea that we might actually move towards a common currency and even perhaps beyond that in time, if our plans mature, towards a single currency. It is a matter of how the issue is expressed. When people look at the coins in their pockets or handbags, particularly the pound coin, I do not believe that they always reckon that they may be looking at five different versions of it. They put their hands in their pockets and produce a number of coins that look the same in general appearance and so they treat them the same, as does everyone to whom they give them. There are various ways to consider the idea of a common currency and eventually a single currency, because coins can look alike while having national characteristics emblazoned on them.

Support will be greater rather than lesser for the idea of a common currency and a single currency when people realise that to move in that direction is not necessarily to have the familiar pound sterling and its supporting currency swept away from them and something else imposed on them, but there are clearly different ways in which to approach the matter. We should not be frightened by the idea that something alien will be thrust upon us.

If the question of a common currency raises no difficulties, I should have thought that there was almost total indifference among the British public on the question of the European central bank. I do not believe that many people are going about their daily lives desperately worried about which type of bank, constituted in which particular way, will lay down the monetary rules to which we must work. It is too fanciful for words to imagine that this is a daily anxiety of the British people.

These are technical matters, and there is among the people a willingness to urge the Government to press on with their efforts to find the right formula for the next stage

of economic and monetary union. The Government are not being pulled back by people desperately worried about a common or a single currency or about a central European bank. The people believe that it is right to carry on and that it would be wrong to give up.

This view is probably more strongly held by young people than by the population at large, for understandable reasons. The opportunities that they have had in their education and to travel have given them a different perspective on Europe and on the importance of the European Community—many of them have grown up knowing nothing else. They are extremely enthusiastic about forging ever closer co-operation between the countries of the Community. I have little doubt that young people would take a generous view of other countries joining the Community in the fullness of time.

It is a diversion to bring sovereignty into this argument; it confuses the issue, which has to do more with technical, mechanistic discussions about whether we need a central European bank, how it should be controlled and what it would mean for the currency.

To most people sovereignty probably means our having the power to take decisions for ourselves. If questioned in public opinion polls people exhibit a natural desire to want to retain the power to take decisions for themselves.

This happens at various levels. There are no greater defenders of their sovereignty than parish and town councils. I have heard uncharitable things said by members of parish councils about the next tier of government above them. It will be said in a village in my constituency that the district council is made up of people who do not understand the villagers, who know what is best for their village and who should take the decisions. But if sewage works, new roads, new houses or even airports are to be built, decisions on them cannot be taken at the parish level.

Just as the parish complains about the district, so the district complains about the county council, which in turn will complain about national Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Mr. Amess) and I share a county council and have received representations from it about the iniquities of the Government, who do not understand, so the councillors say, the special needs of Essex. Of course it is our duty to try to represent those interests. However, the Government's responsibility is to view the national scene.

It is understandable that hon. Members should be extremely suspicious about our powers being taken away, but what powers would we retain for the House? The plain fact is that power has shifted away from this country and away from all nation states. A trivial but topical example illustrates my point: the merger of Sky and BSB. There appear to be imperfect powers available to control that merger, because it is becoming physically impossible for single Governments to control some of the technical developments that have taken place. Major events beyond our shores can still have tumultuous effects on this country, and we on our own cannot control those events. The fact that we are a sovereign Parliament does not stop them happening.

Increasingly we have seen our room for manoeuvre diminish. It is not very satisfying to be left with what might be termed no more than the power to wriggle. There is nothing dignified or edifying about such a situation. We have to come to terms with the modern world. We might also ask where sovereignty has got us over the years. If we look at the performance of British Governments and the Parliaments that have supported them over the past 45 years, can we say that our economic performance has outshone the performance of our neighbours in western Europe? That is manifestly not the case.

The Government have been chided by the Opposition for not being custodians of as great a progress as they should have been. With all the power that we think we have, we have not been able to demonstrate that we can do much better than other democracies in western Europe. So-called sovereignty and total power form a very imperfect balance. We cannot demonstrate that, by attempting to retain sovereignty, we have achieved more for our people than we might achieve if we sought new arrangements in which sovereignty was pooled by linking hands with other Governments, thus giving us more actual power.

I get slightly suspicious when I hear Heads of Government extolling the virtues of Parliament. I hope that that will not be taken the wrong way by the Government. Through the ages Executives have found the legislature a bit of a nuisance. Parliament is an irritating obstacle to Governments who need to get their business through. There gathered are the representatives of the people who ask awkward questions and block progress and try to defeat what the Government in their wisdom are trying to do. When I am told that I am part of an essential process I scratch my head and wonder whether I am living in the real world. I wonder whether the words that I use now or that I may use in future will have the impact that I should like them to have on the Government and the development of their policy. I am not sure that we should be completely persuaded that we have magical powers in our hands in Parliament and that the Government are keen to see us use them and, for that reason, we should hesitate about entering any kind of pan-European arrangement.

The confusion has been made worse because, in discussing sovereignty, we have tied it up with national identity. My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Mr. Knox) referred to that when he alluded to his native Scotland. My hon. Friend is a good European, but no one could possibly mistake him for a Welsh man or an English man. He is distinctly a Scot and Scotland is a proud nation within our United Kingdom. The idea that our national identity will disappear or be submerged is mischievous nonsense.

Whatever arrangements we make, and I am not advocating any in particular, in moving closer towards our Community partners, the last thing that we shall lose is our national identity. We may, in a calculating way, give up some power, but we are not going to give up our identity or our culture. Therefore, we shall remain a distinct nation state, whatever the constitutional bonds with which we choose to tie ourselves to the Community.

Much of the difficulty over moving towards the next stages of economic and monetary union is caused by the fear that somehow even to inch in this direction is to be slipsliding towards federalism. I was greatly disappointed by the speech of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). He is pitching his tent in a curious place, given his former views on this matter. He is now truly a political itinerant, and I am not sure whether his roots are anywhere in terms of his political affiliation or his philosophy. I was shocked by his denunciation of certain developments within the Community.

[Mr. Haselhurst]

I beg leave to doubt that, as a result of the discussions in the intergovernmental conference, we shall end up in some kind of sprint towards a federal state or any other composite form of political union. I believe that the results that will emerge, after many months, will be more modest and more pragmatic than that. I hope that we shall see the beginnings of a greater Community approach to defence matters and some tightening up of co-operation in foreign affairs. To believe that we shall go leaping in the dark into a federal union or anything like that is to envisage genuine cloud cuckoo land, and I doubt whether anyone wants to inhabit that.

When I hear that the proud republic of France is ready to dissolve herself into some form of federal united states of Europe, I shall begin to believe that the time for the United Kingdom and other countries to take a decision has arrived. Until I see that compulsion on the part of France and certain other of our friends in Europe, I shall not believe that this is a practical reality lurking behind every bush waiting to strike at us. Therefore, it is wrong to condemn the sentiments and the talk that naturally goes on about the way in which the Community might develop in political terms.

There is a belief that we have to build a great Europe, and it is wrong to mock those who hold that belief because to do so spoils the atmosphere that makes it possible to achieve greater co-operation in many other important spheres. Clearly, the next sphere on the agenda on which we are hoping to make proper progress is that of economic and monetary union. Political union and developments in that direction will proceed at a much slower pace. There should be progress, but the idea that this will lead to a destination that is so frightening that we must put at arm's length practical questions of how we run the economy of the single market would be both unrealistic and a grave mistake.

I do not see anything terrible about looking at new arrangements in the format of both of these intergovernmental conferences. We should have enough humility to concede that the arrangements that we have in this country for running our economy may not be the best that they can be. They may be capable of improvement and we may be able to find a better way, in conversation and co-operation with our European neighbours.

If the public are prepared to be open minded on these matters, as I believe them to be, industry and commerce will be more certain and determined that this is the right approach for us. It is not in the interests of our industry, on whom our future wealth depends, that we should be spurning the idea of moving forward on economic and monetary matters.

We should not set our face against EMU or currency developments. It is right to consider the possibilities positively and I welcome the Government's assurance that they will contribute constructively to the IGCs. We must hope that they will do so and we must demonstrate goodwill and respect for the aspirations of our partners. Only in that way will we get a deal that is sensible, workable, in British interests and in the interests of all of Europe.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Detergents (Pollution)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

10 pm

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): I am struck by the fact that the first Adjournment debate of the new Session is on an environmental issue and that the last full debate of the previous Session was on the subject of noise. That fact underlines the continuing importance of the environment. In that context I am pleased to welcome to the debate the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), who I know to be an especially active Minister who travels throughout the country seeking to rectify various environmental ills with great success.

I wish to talk tonight about the problems of pollution from household detergents. I believe that the public are beginning slowly to realise that many of the cleaning products in daily use cause unnecessary problems to our environment. Phosphates in detergents have been much in the news for the past year or so in relation to the toxic algal blooms seen in a number of British waters. Last summer a spate of toxic blooms occurred, notably at Rutland water. The issue was raised effectively by my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Latham). In that incident, 23 sheep and 15 dogs died as a result of drinking at the water's edge. Perhaps even more seriously, 10 young soldiers who were canoeing on Rudyard lake in Staffordshire became ill after falling into the water, which contained blue-green algae. Subsequent detailed studies showed that two of the soldiers developed pneumonia as a result of cyanobacteria, a toxin produced by blue-green algae.

As early as March this year there were signs of a recurrence of toxic blooms, and on 10 October the National Rivers Authority confirmed that 440 British waters were on alert to protect the general public. Sixteen days later, on 26 October, it confirmed that 501 British waters were on alert. I submit that this is alarming. We have also seen algal blooms along vast stretches of the east coast which have contaminated shell fish. These blooms must have affected many hon. Members' constituencies.

Phospates, along with nitrates, act as a nutrient to small water plants. Where the level of nutrients is high, and especially in slow-moving waters, rapid growth of algae can occur, and often this is the so-called blue-green algae which release toxins into the water. These toxic algal blooms also use up the oxygen in the water, lowering the amount available for other water life.

It is accepted by the soap powder and detergent industry that about 30 per cent. of the phospate load to British waters comes from detergents, the rest coming from human sewage and agricultural run-off. The NRA has recently stated that

"only a very small increase in phosphate levels is required to encourage algal growth."

Accordingly, it would be prudent to remove this cause of phosphates at source as the other two main sources require more complex and expensive solutions. This would not be unusual in Europe. Bans or tight restrictions on phosphates exist in several countries, including Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Holland and, most recently, France, which introduced a phasing out of the substance in detergents. Those are the sort of countries with which this House compares Britain, time and again, in many ways. Parts of the United States of America have had bans for almost 20 years.

The industry directorate at the Commission in Brussels —DG3—has said that there would be no problem if individual countries wanted to impose restrictions. The prohibition of phosphates in detergents is feasible and would not run counter to any European treaties that Britain has signed. In countries where bans or restrictions already exist, the major detergent companies successfully market phosphate-free products. Indeed, a number of brands of washing powders in the United Kingdom do not contain phosphates, and they now represent almost 20 per cent. of the market. I am not calling for new technology because the alternatives are available and being sold.

The manufacturing process for phosphates releases cadmium and sometimes even radioactive substances from certain types of phosphate ore. Both substances are usually discharged directly into rivers and seas. Albright and Wilson in Cumbria, one of our leading and respected chemical manufacturers, is also one of Britain's largest phosphate manufacturers. It is currently the subject of a private prosecution for the excessive release of heavy metals into the Irish sea. Some manufacturers have used substitutes for phosphates that can also have an adverse effect on the environment.

On the continent, NTA—nitrilo triacetic acid—has been used, but it has been found to combine with heavy metals and reintroduce them to the water supply. The use of that chemical, as well as the use of polycarboxylates —another water-softening agent derived from petroleum —should also be restricted. The biodegradability of the surface active agents used in detergents is governed by 1978 regulations, which lay down a minimum figure of 80 per cent. biodegradability to be achieved under the laboratory conditions of a prescribed test—the so-called OECD test. Although many modern surface active agents pass that level and may reach 90 per cent. or more, we must be concerned about the remaining percentage.

Although most vegetable-based detergents will biodegrade fully in the test due to their purity, many petroleum-based surface active agents, such as the commonly used linear alkylbenzene sulphonate, contain impurities that come from their petroleum base and therefore take much longer to biodegrade. They can be found unbiodegraded in some sewage sludge and even in sediments in the sea near sewage outfalls some years after discharge. A higher level of biodegradability would also reduce the likelihood of foaming in rivers, a phenomenon currently under investigation by the water research centre.

Last July, the Control of Detergent Pollution Bill was introduced by the hon. Member for Southwark and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), with all-party support from, among others, myself, my hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton and, while he was still a free agent, my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), together with several hon. Members from both sides of the House. The Bill contained a number of measures designed to provide environmental protection by removing the problems at source and by educating the consumer to use products more carefully and economically. It would have amended the 1978 detergents composition regulations.

The Bill would have raised the level of biodegradability to 99·9 per cent. in three stages over the next 10 years. It would have encouraged the use of vegetable-based

[Mr. Robin Squire]

surfactants, which are derived from renewable resources, adding to the long-term sustainability of the industry. The labelling of the agents under current regulations is limited to requiring the name of the product and, believe it or not, the name and address of the seller. The Bill sought to improve consumer information with the inclusion of a full listing of ingredients. It would also have provided consumers with clear instructions for accurate dosing according to water hardness. That, coupled with a caution to use the product carefully, would have ensured minimum wastage with consequent benefits both to consumers' pockets and to the environment.

It is clear that this measure, or equivalent Government action, could be of great benefit to the environment. For instance, at present the manufacturers of some major brands of washing powder recommend the use of quantities of powder that will not even fit in the dispenser of a washing machine; others require only a quarter of that amount.

Let me deal with some of the counter-attacks launched on phosphate-free detergents. A document was produced in February this year entitled "Phosphate-free detergents: better for the environment—or worse?". It was written by the Scientific Committee on Phosphates in Europe—which provides us with the convenient mnemonic "SCOPE". It is perhaps relevant to mention that SCOPE includes manufacturers of phosphates with an inevitable interest in their continued production.

Unsurprisingly, SCOPE concluded that

"phosphate limitations . . . are not of any real benefit in resolving algal growth problems."

SCOPE claims that, because modern sewerage treatment plants permit the removal of most phosphates from all sources of sewage, the need to restrict their entry into the water cycle is removed. I submit that that is a misconceived argument. The logical option is presumably to seek both —not least to reduce the cost of phosphate-stripping to all of us, as well as substantially reducing the total phosphate load entering the environment.

The attack on phosphate-free detergents, which are already sold here and in many other countries, continued with other misleading claims. SCOPE said:

"They increase concentration of enzymes."

However, some leading phosphate-free detergents contain no enzymes at all.

Most astonishingly, SCOPE claims that

"such detergents wash less efficiently."

However, Procter and Gamble has introduced Ariel Ultra, a phosphate-free detergent that is claimed to provide the best wash available on the market. So much for the allegation that phosphate-free detergents cannot wash as well.

I submit that the quality of British water is a matter of public concern—perhaps growing public concern—and will be for as long as knowledge of the growth in algal blooms spreads. The measures proposed in the Bill in July —highlighted by me tonight—are all now technically feasible. They would be simple to introduce, and would remove an unnecessary source of pollution. I stress—if I need to—that I am not suggesting that phosphates in detergents are the only problem that we face in water pollution; nor, as I hope I have made clear, do I allege that they are the main cause of phosphates in the water cycle. However, I do say that the control, reduction and elimination of this aspect of phosphate use—in accordance with the already adopted practice of so many other European countries—is simple and desirable, and would improve our environment within a short time.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider the matter carefully. I do not expect him to announce what might be interpreted as a revolution tonight; however, I ask him to consider whether Britain needs this extra phosphate load, which—for no practical good—is certainly contributing to the pollution of our environment.

10.13 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on securing this Adjournment debate, and on choosing a topic that is of great interest and considerable concern to many people. As I expected, he spoke with knowledge and authority; he certainly gave me some ideas to consider after the response that I shall be making this evening.

My hon. Friend will know that the subject of phosphates in the water environment has been of interest to successive Governments for some years. In 1954, a standing technical committee was established to keep under review the consequences of the use of increasing quantities of synthetic detergents. It was through the efforts of that committee and the people serving on it that the biodegradability of detergents of the order of 95 per cent. was achieved in Britain when the requirement of the EC directive was only 80 per cent.

In 1978 the committee reported that it was satisfied then that there was no necessity to replace phosphate with substitutes in detergent formulations. In its 20th and final report, the committee reviewed detergent phosphate and eutrophication and reported that there were no instances of difficulties arising in sewage treatment works, natural waters and water supply as a result of detergents and associated products. Since 1980, an industry liaison group has assumed the task of advising the Government about the impact of detergents on the environment.

My hon. Friend has brought us up to date, and drawn our attention to some of the problems associated with the use of phosphate in detergent. We should not, however, overlook the positive qualities which have led to its use in detergents. It prevents scum formation and the greying of clothes, and allows the soil particles to be rinsed safely out into the wash water. It also prevents lump formation in packages, which in turn minimises wastage. To maintain washing efficiency, the removal of one ingredient, such as phosphate, must be accompanied by the substitution of another, or even more than one. It may also require the increased use of surface-active agents. If the product is judged less effective by the consumer, greater quantities will be used in an effort to achieve a satisfactory wash. All those factors, too, must be taken into account in assessing the overall impact on the environment.

However, I agree with my hon. Friend that consumers should be able to make informed choices in this area. The soap and detergent industry has voluntarily introduced a labelling scheme to show the main ingredients. This is in line with EC recommendations. We need to give that scheme an opportunity to prove effective, but if it turns out that the consumer is not satisfied, and my hon. Friend said that in his opinion the labelling requirements were

insufficient, we will consider further requirements. My hon. Friend may know that we hope to introduce a wider environmental labelling scheme in association with our EC partners next year. One of the product categories that will be addressed may be detergents and washing powders.

My hon. Friend has drawn attention to his concern about possible environmental problems associated with inputs of phosphorus into rivers. Strictly speaking, eutrophication, about which he spoke, means rich in nutrients, but the term is more often used to describe problems that can occur in eutrophic waters. Those problems generally stem from excessive growth of algae. As my hon. Friend knows, algae are minute aquatic plants that grow naturally in all surface waters. They are essential to the well-being of the aquatic environment, although if their growth becomes excessive, that causes problems. Their growth is determined by combinations of environmental factors such as sunlight, the length of day, temperature, nutrients, and so on. I should also point out that, although an adequate supply of phosphorus is essential for the growth of algae, it is only one of many factors required. Nitrogen, silicon and vitamin B12 are other nutrients necessary for algal growth. However, in fresh waters, phosphorus can be the limiting factor, and therefore control can sometimes be achieved by reducing phosphorus levels.

As the House knows, and as my hon. Friend certainly knows, the National Rivers Authority has recently completed an extensive study of the incidence and causes of blue-green algal blooms in inland waters. Its report was published on 1 October this year. It concluded that the high incidence of algal blooms in 1989 was not a unique event either in Britain or abroad. It attributed this to the stable environmental conditions during that summer preceded by a mild winter. Those conditions allowed the algae to exploit more completely the available nutrients.

The NRA concluded that control of eutrophication must be considered on a case-by-case basis in order to determine the best means of dealing with the problem. It set out in the report the various options for the management of algal growth in the form of a decision tree. They include phosphate stripping of sewage effluent as an option in certain circumstances, but in view of the low levels of phosphate required to prevent algal blooms, other measures may be more appropriate.

A separate independent report published this year by Professor Lund and Professor Moss reached broadly similar conclusions. Two of the main findings were that phosphate stripping at sewage treatment plants is an effective tool that should be used where problems exist; and that the broad scale removal of phosphorus from detergents would not be an effective way of solving local problems.

As my hon. Friend will know, some other countries have more extensive problems of eutrophication in inland and coastal waters than we have in the United Kingdom, and have, therefore, taken steps to reduce the level of phosphorus in rivers. Some countries—notably Norway, Switzerland and Italy—have imposed a total ban on phosphate in detergents. Others, such as France and Germany, have imposed limits on the use of phosphate in detergents. But many other countries, including Belgium, Denmark, Sweden and Spain, have no such restrictions.

More commonly, steps have been taken to reduce the levels in sewage effluent by chemical stripping at sewage works feeding the affected waters. Examples of that approach in the United Kingdom are at the Norfolk broads and, more recently, at Lake Windermere. That approach was recommended by the United Kingdom standing technical committee on synthetic detergents in 1980, and is also a requirement of the draft EC directive, which would set minimum standards of treatment for municipal waste water.

An advantage of that system is that it reduces phosphorus from all sources, including the 25 to 30 per cent. contribution from detergents. A further advantage is that the phosphorus stripped out may be used again, either as a fertiliser or as a raw material for industrial processes. The replacement of phosphorus in detergents would not remove the need for phosphate stripping of sewage effluents discharging into eutrophic waters.

The Government's current view is that, in considering detergent, one needs to look at the whole formulation and its environmental impact rather than the impact of individual components. There is a wide choice of substitutes, as my hon. Friend mentioned, but there are uncertainties about the environmental impact of their use. One of the first substitutes was nitrilo triacetic acid, to which he drew attention, and which is now banned in some countries because of its adverse environmental effect. Another substitute, zeolites, can cause scale formation and increased sludges at sewage works, and may lead to the release of metallic ions, such as aluminium, to rivers, and so on. We must be careful that in attempting to solve one environmental problem we do not create another.

The current position is that we are not contemplating a ban on the use of phosphates because there remain so many uncertainties about substitutes. That is in addition to the point I made earlier that where phosphate is a local problem it is generally more effective to strip out phosphate at the nearby sewage treatment works. Phosphate stripping also has the advantage that it removes all phosphates and not merely the 25 to 30 per cent. which are contributed by detergents.

However, considerable uncertainties remain. Therefore, I think that my hon. Friend will be pleased to note that we have commissioned a study into the problems which may be caused by pollutants in cleaning and conditioning agents. Professor Roger Perry of Imperial college—who will certainly be known to my hon. Friend through his membership of the Select Committee—started work on the study in May this year. It examines the effect of these chemicals on aquatic life. It also examines the effects on water and sewage treatment plant operations and on sludge disposal, and will look for adverse effects on human health by contact or by influence of the quality of drinking water.

The results of this study will be available next year and will enable us to take a more comprehensive view of the consequences of phosphorus restrictions. I think that this is the only rational approach to the problems to which my hon. Friend has rightly drawn attention. I shall certainly ensure that the director of that study is made aware of the valuable comments which my hon. Friend made in this evening's debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-six minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 8 November 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

NEW WRITS

For the borough constituency of Paisley, North, in the room of Allender Steele Adams, Esq., deceased—

For the borough constituency of Paisley, South, in the room of Norman Findlay Buchan, Esq., deceased—*[Mr. Foster.]*

Clydesdale Steelworks

2.36 pm

Mr. Donald Dewar (Glasgow, Garscadden) *(by private notice)*: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking in the light of the announced closure of the Clydesdale steel plant and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mr. Malcolm Rifkind): The proposed closure of the Clydesdale steelworks is a matter of great regret and a very serious blow for the town of Bellshill. There has been a general awareness that Clydesdale had been operating in a very difficult market and making losses for some time. The decision to close, while clearly unwelcome, is not therefore entirely unexpected.

Fortunately, Lanarkshire unemployment has fallen significantly in recent years—by more than 12,000 since 1987. But it remains too high and these job losses will be an unwelcome addition.

I shall be asking my officials, the Scottish Development Agency and the local enterprise company to consider urgently the consequences for the area and its needs. In the meantime the SDA study will consider the prospects for the steel sector in Scotland, including Clydesdale. I expect to learn of its emerging findings in the course of next month and British Steel has assured me that it would consider carefully any commercial opportunity that it may identify.

Mr. Dewar: Does the Secretary of State accept that today's announcement is a devastating blow to Lanarkshire and the Scottish economy, that it will be felt far beyond the borders of the town of Bellshill and that it is a tragedy for the loyal work force, who have fought so hard over many months to save the plant? Does he further accept that it is not enough simply to talk about how the blow might be cushioned and what ameliorative action might be taken? Does he accept that that is cold comfort and that we wanted some signs of activity from the Government that they were trying to preserve the plant and capacity in the steel industry, which the country may need in years to come?

The Secretary of State knows that the stewards, with strong, informed support, are pressing for an investment package, modest in scope when measured even against British Steel's profits this year, but designed to give the plant a competitive edge. Did he endorse and argue for that package in his contact with British Steel's top management or did he merely act as a courier passing on other people's opinions? Is he prepared to do his bit even now to attempt to reverse the decision?

Does the Secretary of State share my anger that British Steel should claim as justification for the closure that the mill at Clydesdale was out of date and obsolete, so using its own failings and lack of vision in its care to justify the closure? Is he prepared to use the Government's contacts even at this stage to search and search again for a possible buyer or partnership deal to save the plant? He proclaimed —I remember it vividly—that the best way to secure the future of the industry was privatisation. Does not he owe at least that to the work force? Is not he ashamed to admit that if the closures go ahead, tubes for the North sea will come from France, Germany or even Japan, indeed anywhere but Britain?

Mr. Rifkind: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that today's announcement is a sad blow for what has been a loyal work force. I met representatives on Monday when we discussed the plant's prospects. They discussed with me their proposals for investment, which I drew to the attention of Sir Robert Scholey when I saw him. Naturally, we have asked British Steel to consider any sensible commercial proposals for any of its plants in Scotland, as one would expect.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether one should search for a possible alternative buyer for the plant. I refer him to the study that is being carried out by the Scottish Development Agency, the point of which is to identify commercial opportunities for the steel sector in Scotland. It is important that British Steel is co-operating in that study. Contact has already been made between Sir Robert Scholey and Sir David Nickson, chairman of the SDA. We expect the preliminary views of the study next month. I hope that it will identify whether there are commercial opportunities and, if so, what they are. Clearly, if any progress is to be made, it is most likely to take place on that basis.

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): Does the Secretary of State even yet not recognise the devastation that will be wrought in the Bellshill and Motherwell area by this announcement? What sort of Christmas present is it for thousands of families and children from Bob Scholey? Does the Secretary of State begin to recognise the anger and betrayal felt by the workers, many of whom I spoke to this morning? Over the past few years the work force have increased productivity, reduced delivery dates and enhanced quality at a time when British Steel has been starving them of investment. Does he recognise that when British Steel says today that it is cheaper to buy products from abroad, it is simply because British Steel has refused to match the commitment of the work force with investment and retailing at the Clydesdale plant? No matter what the efforts of the work force, it is still cheaper to get those goods from abroad.

The Secretary of State talks about an SDA study, but he need not wait months. Let me give him the figures from the House of Commons Library. If the process continues at Clydesdale, Ravenscraig and Dalzell, there will be 40 per cent. male unemployment in the Lanarkshire travel-to-work area. The Secretary of State is presiding over the social and economic devastation of my constituency. If he does not pull his finger out and do something other than wring his hands, he will never be forgiven by the people of Scotland.

Mr. Rifkind: Until the latter parts of the hon. Gentleman's remarks when he became slightly emotive, perhaps understandably as he represents the interests of his constituents, I could agree with much of what he said, because I recognise the bitter blow that this must be for his constituents in Bellshill. He is correct to describe the work force as a loyal one, who have worked hard. It is indeed paradoxical when the plant is working fully and producing the products for which it is known and when British Steel has been so successful in becoming competitive and profitable in many other areas and in winning orders, that it seems unable to do so for this plant. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we have no intention of waiting months to find out what may be possible to alleviate the situation. We are already awaiting the conclusions of the SDA report and are determined to do what we can in co-operation with the local enterprise company, the SDA and others to alleviate the consequences of any unemployment that may be caused.

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): Is not this just another example of death by a thousand cuts of the Scottish steel industry at the hands of British Steel? Before we go further and see even more of the industry whittled away, should not we put together the steel assets in Scotland and give someone else the opportunity through ownership and management to make a go of the Scottish steel industry in the interests of Scotland and of those who have devoted their lives to it?

Mr. Rifkind: That indeed may be an option which some may wish to pursue. It may be an attractive option, but, of course, it presupposes that there would be an interested buyer for the assets. The first stage is to consider whether there are commercial opportunities—I stress commercial opportunities—for this steel sector and that is what the SDA report will identify. If such opportunities are identified, we hope that British Steel, which has shown its willingness to co-operate with the study, will in the first instance seek to work them.

Dr. Jeremy Bray (Motherwell, South): Is the Secretary of State aware that the surrender of the North sea market to imported tubes is a confession of abject failure by the Government and British Steel? Can he explain why the appropriate investment was not undertaken in the many years for which the Government were responsible for the steel industry and by British Steel since privatisation? Is he aware that no action has been taken in Lanarkshire for the creation of new jobs since, six months ago, the Secretary of State announced an initiative for such job creation? Is he further aware of the misery caused by this first of many blows expected to fall on Lanarkshire?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman will know as well as I do that when British Steel was in public ownership, under either Labour or Conservative Governments, decisions on investment were taken by the company and not by the Government. Therefore, any question about a lack of investment is a matter for which British Steel, whether publicly or privately owned, must take responsibility.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Monklands, West): Does the Secretary of State accept that this announcement is a devastating blow to the people of Clydesdale and Lanarkshire? Does not he regret supporting the privatisation of the steel industry, and does not he accept the consequences of that decision? Will he bear it in mind that in constituencies such as mine, which is next door to Clydesdale, the spin-off effect will be considerable and many firms that are already worrying about high interest rates will be deeply concerned? Finally, in the light of this tragic news for the people of Lanarkshire, does he agree that the time has come for him to cease playing the part of Pontius Pilate, which is as unacceptable as it is repugnant to the people of Lanarkshire in the modern world?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues would sound more convincing in their complaints about the privatisation of British Steel if the Labour party had not made it quite clear that a future Labour Government do not intend to return British Steel to public ownership. Therefore, it is less than convincing for the hon.

Gentleman or his hon. Friends to make mealy-mouthed and unconvincing comments about the consequences of privatisation.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): Does not the Secretary of State accept that this is a despicable decision by the management of British Steel, which is clearly hellbent on the destruction of the Scottish steel industry? Does not he acknowledge that this is not just a disaster for Scotland, but it is of no value at all to the United Kingdom to yield up its market share to foreign competitors against the background of our present balance of payments deficit? Is not it time for him to take the lead with the SDA, the work force and the Scottish financial community, to do as the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) suggested and set up a company that can buy out the assets of Scottish steel, get the investment and give British Steel the competition that it needs and deserves?

Mr. Rifkind: We have already made it clear that we expect the Scottish Development Agency study to identify whether there are commercial opportunities. I have no doubt that the type of suggestion made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) will be one of the possibilities that the study may wish to consider.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): What other country in the world, in the face of a huge and expanding market in the North sea, would shut down its indigenous steel industry? Is the Secretary of State aware that British Steel's share of the new Beryl export pipeline in the North sea is a mere 1 per cent? Does not it worry him that British Steel can make lots of money by importing other people's steel and retailing it in the United Kingdom? Why will not he press for a Monopolies and Mergers Commission inquiry into the abuse of monopoly power by British Steel? Does not this latest episode in the whole process of the rundown of Scottish steel show that steel is too important to be left to the private sector and belongs in the public sector where the strategic assets of Scotland could be properly protected and developed?

Mr. Rifkind: The hon. Gentleman appears to represent the only party in the House—indeed probably the only party in western Europe—that wants the steel industry to be controlled by Governments and by the state. It is a matter for great sadness that British Steel, which has been so competitive in many other areas, appears to have been unable to be competitive with the products that it produces at Clydesdale. That is a matter of regret and it is a point that the House is entitled to observe.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Does not the Secretary of State realise that this further butchering of the Scottish steel industry is the clearest demonstration that we have had of the futility and failure of the Government's hands-off approach? Does not he accept that the reason why there has been so much difficulty in the Scottish steel industry in the past 10 years is the narrow remit that the Government gave British Steel to pursue the quickest profit in the shortest possible time and the failure to look ahead and understand that there is not only the North sea, although that area is valuable for selling products, but the possibility of worldwide export markets, which the Government should have addressed long before now? Will not he see sense and understand exactly what he is doing and will he take action to protect the jobs and the manufacturing industry of this country?

Mr. Rifkind: Behind the hon. Gentleman's rhetoric it is difficult to identify the policy initiatives that he believes ought to be taken. As a member of a party with a new-found commitment to the European Community, he should be aware that its rules prevent direct Government assistance to the steel industry. If he does not know that, it is about time that he found it out.

Mr. Richard Holt (Langbaurgh): May I remind my right hon. and learned Friend of Corby and Consett in my constituency, where thousands of jobs were lost in the steel industry? Thanks to privatisation and the expertise of the management, today we have a British steel industry on Teesside that is the envy of the world and, instead of whingeing, Teessiders have got on, working in co-operation with the Government so that today even hostile friends are saying that, despite any recession that may be in the air, Teesside is doing very well indeed, thank you.

Mr. Rifkind: I am sure that the whole House will be delighted that Teesside is doing very well. It would be unwise to believe that the interests of any one locality can best be served at the expense of others. We are a united kingdom, interested in the health of the economy of the United Kingdom as a whole.

Mr. Norman Hogg (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman recall that yesterday afternoon the Prime Minister, when addressing the House of Commons, chided the Leader of the Opposition for overlooking what she called

"the economic resurgence that we have brought about in the past 12 years"?—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 22.]

In what context does the Secretary of State place the Prime Minister's remarks, given today's announcement? Where is the economic resurgence that he can be proud of?

Mr. Rifkind: I am happy to respond to the hon. Gentleman. My right hon. Friend was entirely correct. In Lanarkshire alone, unemployment has fallen by 12,000 over the past few years. Scottish unemployment continued to fall in each of the past few months. Prospects for economic growth in Scotland are still deemed to be encouraging by all the economic surveys that have been carried out. The hon. Gentleman appears to regret the fact that the Scottish economy is doing better at the moment than it has done for many years—that is something which he should take great pride in and not regret.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that this is a private notice question and that this matter may certainly be raised during the debate on the Queen's Speech by those who have not been called.

Autumn Statement

2.53 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. John Major): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement.

The Cabinet agreed the Government's expenditure plans this morning. I am, therefore, now able to inform the House of the public expenditure outturn for this year; the plans for the next three years; our proposals for national insurance contributions in 1991-92; and the forecast of economic prospects for 1991 required by the Industry Act 1975.

As usual, the main public expenditure figures, together with the full text of the economic forecast, will be available from the Vote Office as soon as I sit down. The printed "Autumn Statement" will be published next Tuesday.

In this survey we have had to take some tough decisions in the interests of the economy and the new plans represent a very tight settlement. But it is a settlement which is fully consistent with the Government's commitments and channels extra resources to the areas where the need is greatest. For this, and other reasons, I should like to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary for the skill and persistence with which he has brought the survey to a successful conclusion.

Since 1984-85, while the economy has grown by nearly 20 per cent., total public spending has risen scarcely at all in real terms. As a result, the ratio of public expenditure to national income has fallen by more than seven percentage points, the largest sustained fall for 40 years. Moreover, in the past three years large budget surpluses have enabled us to repay debt totalling £26 billion.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Not any more.

Mr. Major: We shall add to that this year.

The main objective of economic policy at present must be to bring inflation down, but, as we do so, the short-term prospect is bound to be one of weak activity. *[Interruption.]* In the past, during similar periods the ratio of public spending to national income has risen strongly. On this occasion it will not.

Planned public expenditure in the current fiscal year is now expected to be £180·6 billion, rather less than 1 per cent. above the planning total set a year ago. A large part of this extra spending is due to an increase in the financing requirements of the nationalised industries, to a surge of common agricultural policy spending on agricultural market support and to expenditure on the Gulf crisis.

Notwithstanding this cash overrun, public expenditure remains under tight control. Inflation has been higher than forecast, but it has not been allowed to feed through fully into expenditure. As a result, the ratio of spending to national income in the current year is likely to be slightly lower than projected at the time of the Budget—virtually unchanged from the 1989-90 level.

The decisions on public expenditure for the next three years have been taken against a more difficult world and domestic economic background than for some time. Activity at home and abroad has begun to weaken and some countries such as Canada and the United States are expected to grow very slowly indeed over the coming year. The outlook has also been complicated by events in the Gulf, with the rise in oil prices and the uncertainty that they have produced. Against that background, our new plans are designed to protect the most vulnerable groups in society against the effects of higher inflation—*[Interruption.]* I repeat, to protect the most vulnerable groups in society and to maintain longer-term policies to improve the working of the economy.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby) *rose*——

Mr. Major: I shall of course give way to the hon. Gentleman when we come to questions a little later.

But, beyond that, this is not the year for making substantial additions to plans in other areas. The priority must be to honour existing commitments, within a total for public spending that is affordable and fiscally prudent.

For 1991-92, the new planning total has been set at £200 billion, a little under £8 billion more than the previously published figure. The planning totals in the following two years are £215 billion and £226 billion respectively.

In recognition of the economic uncertainties and the risks arising from the Gulf crisis, these totals include higher reserves than last year's plans: £3½ billion in the first year; £7 billion in the second year; and £10½ billion in the third. I believe that these increases are prudent. Our plans also incorporate an estimate of privatisation proceeds at £5½ billion a year that is in line with the average outturn in recent years.

After taking account of inflation, the level of spending next year will be rather less than implied by last year's plans: that is, the cash additions to the planning total do not fully compensate for the higher level of prices now expected for 1991-92. This restraint is necessary, but it means that many of my colleagues have had to drop or postpone proposals that they would otherwise have regarded as desirable.

Nevertheless, within this total there are substantial extra resources in three main areas: health, social security and central Government support for local authority services. These additions to plans total some £7½ billion in 1991-92. It has also been possible to make improvements to other key areas including education, public transport, and the environment.

We have also been able to make savings elsewhere, including defence. I can assure the House categorically that financial constraints will not hinder in any way the United Kingdom's military contribution to resolving the Gulf crisis. However, the "Options for Change" announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 25 July will produce increasing savings in the defence budget. Over the next three years the new plans provide for a real reduction in defence spending of about 6 per cent., and further reductions should be achieved in later years as my right hon. Friend's proposals are fully implemented. For the first time in the period since world war 2, we are now able safely to plan on a defence budget that is significantly less than one tenth of all Government expenditure and falling.

In certain other areas, we have been able to accommodate increases in expenditure by finding offsetting savings. For example, on the trade and industry and employment programmes we have made selective increases while keeping broadly to existing plans overall, and within the Home Office programme, lower prison population forecasts have enabled us to reduce the prison

building programme, while considerable resources have been made available for the refurbishment of existing prisons, including Strangeways.

In July, the Government announced extra support for local authority current spending which will add around £2½ billion to previous plans. Current spending by local authorities has substantially outstripped central Government spending over recent years. This year local authorities in England budgeted for increases of over 5 per cent. in real terms before capping. This has led to community charges which in many authorities are far higher than expected or justified.

The additional support that we are providing for next year should enable local authorities to finance local services without sharp increases in their charges. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment has already announced that, if required, the Government will make vigorous use of their powers to cap high-spending authorities. I re-emphasise that.

Nearly £3 billion has been added to the social security plans for next year. This mainly reflects the upratings already announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security which maintain in full the real value of benefits paid to 10 million pensioners and 11 million people on income-related benefits. The additions also reflect the substantial extra cost of community charge benefit which will help about one in four charge payers. My right hon. Friend was also able to announce selective increases for poorer pensioners, people in residential and nursing homes and families. These improvements will be financed within the social security programme by savings from restructuring the statutory sick pay scheme, as announced by my right hon. Friend on 24 October.

As in previous years, the Government have also made very substantial extra provision for health. Between this year and next, spending on the national health service in the United Kingdom will rise by £3 billion, so that the real resources over and above inflation that are available for spending on health will increase by a further 5 per cent. The total real increase in health service spending since 1979 will now be nearly 50 per cent. This has enabled the NHS to employ some 8,000 more hospital doctors and dentists, and over 50,000 more nurses and, of course, to provide for more sophisticated health care than ever before. As a result, more than 1¼ million more in-patient and day cases are now treated every year. In the largest sustained programme of hospital building ever seen, nearly 500 major capital schemes have been completed since 1979. The plans that I am announcing ensure that the next three years will see further improvements in services.

Extra finance is also being provided for public transport. London Transport and British Rail have large long-term investment programmes which will enable them to extend and to upgrade the London underground and to prepare for the opening of the channel tunnel. Between them, they will spend some £¾ billion on safety alone in the next three years. The new plans also consolidate the substantial extra provision for roads that was announced last year and include measures to relieve congestion in London. Investment in public transport in the next three years will be double the level of the past three years.

Central Government spending on education will be increased by more than £500 million next year, largely to finance the record number of students in higher education. One in five of the 18 to 19 age group will be in higher education, compared with one in eight only a decade ago. The number of higher education qualifications gained, as a proportion of the relevant age group, is higher in the United Kingdom than in Germany, France, Italy and almost every other European country.

Following the publication of the White Paper on the environment, the new plans provide significant extra resources for environmental research and in support of environmental bodies such as the National Rivers Authority and the Countryside Commission. There is extra provision also for the Government's programme of action on rooflessness.

Throughout the past decade, we have sustained a high level of capital spending in the public sector. In total, it will approach £30 billion in the current year. Leaving aside defence, our new plans include an extra £1½ billion a year for investment by central Government and nationalised industries. There is also extra support for local authorities' capital spending on schools, housing and local transport.

Taking capital and current together, real growth in total public spending over the three survey years will be less than 2 per cent. a year—well within the trend growth of the economy. As I have said, this is a tight settlement and it means that the ratio of public spending to national income should remain stable at its present level for the next two years. Thereafter, as activity strengthens and inflation remains in check, the downward trend will be resumed.

I now turn to national insurance contributions. As usual, the review this autumn has taken account of advice from the Government Actuary on the income and expenditure of the national insurance fund, and of the statement on benefits that was made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Social Security on 24 October.

The lower earnings limit at which contributions begin will go up next April to £52 a week, in line with the single person's basic pension, while the upper earnings limit will rise to £390 a week. The upper limits for the reduced employers' rates will also be increased.

In addition to those changes, there will be reductions in the contribution rates paid by employers. As my right hon. Friend explained in the House on 24 October, the restructuring of statutory sick pay will add modestly to employers' costs from next April. It is right that the Exchequer should share these costs. Therefore, the main employers' contribution rate will fall next April from 10·45 per cent. to 10·4 per cent. and each of the lower rates will be cut by 0·4 per cent. This relief through contributions will limit the impact of the statutory sick pay adjustments on employers of lower-paid workers in particular. The necessary legislation will be laid before the House. The contribution rates paid by employees and the class 4 rates paid by the self-employed will remain unchanged.

I am publishing today the economic forecast required by the Industry Act 1975, the first since we became members of the exchange rate mechanism. I must emphasise at the outset that the Gulf crisis and its effect on world oil markets make the future unusually difficult to predict. The United Kingdom, along with other countries, has already seen some of the adverse impact on consumer price inflation. The oil price rise is likely also to contribute to the general slowdown in the world economy that was already under way before the Gulf crisis.

For the Industry Act forecast I am following the practice of international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and assuming some fall in

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oil prices from recent levels to around $25 a barrel by the end of 1991. But I must reiterate that the situation in the oil market remains very volatile.

Despite these uncertainties, however, it is now clear that the tight United Kingdom policy stance of the past two years is bringing about an easing of domestic inflationary pressures. This will make possible both a sharp fall in retail prices index inflation next year and a strengthening of output.

So far this year, the public sector debt repayment has been running below both last year's outturn and our expectations at Budget time. Local authority borrowing was particularly high earlier this year as some authorities experienced delays in collecting non-domestic rates and the community charge. Public corporations' finances have been adversely affected by the slowdown in economic activity and central Government spending has also been higher. Nevertheless, despite this, I still expect a significant debt repayment in the year as a whole of £3 billion. This amounts to ½ per cent. of GDP and represents a strong fiscal stance at this stage of the economic cycle.

Mr. Skinner: What was the right hon. Gentleman's forecast?

Mr. Major: For the benefit of the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), we have a stronger fiscal position than Germany, France, the United States and every other member of the Group of Seven, with the solitary exception of Japan.

Thus our public finances remain strong. Given our membership of the exchange rate mechanism and the counter-inflationary strategy that we are pursuing, it is essential that they remain strong. As I made clear to the House last month, the Government remain committed to the medium-term objective of a balanced budget. That is why we have continued our firm restraint of public expenditure in the current year.

Turning to demand and output, it is clear that growth has now slowed down sharply. GDP is forecast to grow by 1 per cent. this year. This figure is the same as the forecast I made at the time of the Budget, but the path has been slightly different, and I expect output in the second half of the year to be down on the higher than expected and projected level in the first half.

This period of weak activity should last until early next year, after which I expect growth to resume; GDP is expected to grow by over 2 per cent. in 1991, though year-on-year growth is forecast to be only ½ per cent.

Unemployment has been rising since the spring and may continue to rise in the months immediately ahead, but job prospects will improve with a resumption of growth, the more so if employers keep tight control of costs, including pay rises.

Within domestic demand, growth of consumer spending has now slowed markedly from over 7 per cent. two years ago to under 3 per cent. in the first half of this year. The signs are that it will fall further over the year ahead as consumers continue to adjust to lower growth of real incomes, following the high borrowing of recent years.

Business investment rose by an unprecedented 45 per cent. in the three years to 1989, taking investment to an historically high level as a share of GDP. It may have fallen slightly in 1990 and is expected to fall a little further next year. A modest downturn from such a high level is unsurprising; indeed, it would be extraordinary if it did not occur at this stage in the cycle. It will still leave investment over 50 per cent. higher in real terms than in 1979.

The current account has now begun to improve markedly. With low growth of domestic demand, import volumes have shown virtually no growth over the past year and import prices have been falling in recent months as a result of the firm exchange rate. Export growth, on the other hand, has remained strong over the past year so that the United Kingdom's share of world trade in manufactures has risen for the second year running. The deficit on visible trade has followed a welcome trend and has virtually halved since the middle of 1989. This progress has been partly offset by poor figures for invisibles in recent quarters, although in the past these have, more often than not, been revised up later—at times, substantially.

I now expect that the current account deficit in 1990 will remain close to the forecast I made at the time of the Budget—at just over £15 billion. With domestic demand and import growth likely to stay low, I expect a considerably improved performance next year, with the deficit falling to £11 billion despite some slowdown in export growth as world trade decelerates. As a proportion of gross domestic product the deficit is expected to fall from 3¾ per cent. last year to 1¼ per cent. in 1991—a sharp improvement.

I am now certain that inflationary pressures have been brought firmly under control. The monetary indicators show this clearly. The growth of M0 has fallen every month since April and is now considerably within its target range, while growth of the wider measure, M4, and lending have fallen sharply to 14½ per cent. and 15½ per cent. respectively. With demand and output slowing markedly over the past two years, it is clear that inflation will come down next year. The fall in the headline figure will be very sharp as the effects of the past mortgage rate rises, of the high initial level of the community charge and of recent petrol price increases cease to influence the inflation rate by the end of next year. From a peak at the current level of about 11 per cent., I expect RPI inflation to fall to around 5½ per cent. in the fourth quarter of next year.

In summary, the plans that I have announced today honour our existing commitments and provide additional resources for key areas—notably for the health service, for pensioners and for investment. They are within an overall total we can afford and they avoid the sharp upturn in the share of expenditure in national output which has occurred at similar stages in previous economic cycles. They are, therefore, consistent with the tight fiscal and monetary policies that will lead to a falling trade deficit and to a sharp reduction in inflation. They are, in my judgment, the right policies for building on the economic achievements of the past decade and I commend them to the House.

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): Can the Chancellor of the Exchequer explain why, in his analysis of our economic situation, he was unable to utter the word "recession"? Is not it clear from the surveys compiled by the Confederation of British Industry and by the chambers of commerce, let alone from the experience of commerce and industry from one end of the country to another, that

we are the midst of a recession and that the outlook for an economy with falling output, with declining investment and with rising unemployment is far from encouraging?

From table 11 in the "Economic Prospects for 1991" section of the autumn statement, is not it clear that output is predicted to fall significantly in the second half of 1990 and in the first half of 1991—that is, for a whole year or for four quarters? By any definition, is not that a recession? Why is that information hidden in a table at the back of the published document? Why does not the Chancellor come to the Dispatch Box and admit that, as his figures prove, we are in a recession and that the recession has been caused by the Government's economic policies? Is not it the case that the only way in which he can justify the phrase in his statement about "strengthening of output" is by a leap of faith that output will suddenly increase in the second half of 1991?

Is not it clear from the Chancellor's document that, having predicted in his Budget—not all that long ago—that manufacturing output would increase by ¾ per cent. in the first half of next year, he now predicts that it will fall by ½ per cent. for the whole of that year? In the Budget, investment was forecast to decline by ¾ per cent. in the first half of next year; now it is forecast to be falling by 1¾ per cent. for the whole of 1991. In the Budget, exports were predicted to increase by 5½ per cent.; now they are forecast to rise by just 2½ per cent.

As we are clearly experiencing a recession, why do the Government continue to cause reductions in the investment expenditure of the Department of Trade and Industry? Why is it cut by £250 million in cash terms, and by even more in real terms? As we prepare for 1992, should not we be increasing investment in the regions, in training, in export promotion and in research and development?

Can the Chancellor tell us whether he has reversed the cuts in the training budget that he announced last year? The Department of Employment appears to have sustained a cut of £370 million; I understand that some of that is accounted for by £254 million going to Scottish Enterprise, which will take over responsibility for some of these functions in Scotland. I must tell the Chancellor that, with considerable difficulty, I was able just a few minutes ago to extract from the Department of Employment its press release explaining its figures. It said:

"Employment training, which is already running substantially below capacity this year, will be reduced in scale and reshaped to give TECs more discretion in matching the needs of their local labour markets . . . Payments to TECs will be more closely focused on their success in securing jobs and qualifications for participants."

We have learnt from the past that—as far as the Government are concerned—closer focusing equals reduction. While we are in the midst of our present economic difficulties, why on earth are we cutting spending on training? Will the Chancellor tell us what the cut is and will he tell us why?

The Government will also seek to take credit for the instances in which there are planned increases in the totals for public expenditure. Will the Chancellor reflect on the experience of last year? The figures provided today show that a planned expenditure total of £179 billion turned out to be £180 billion. However, the GDP deflator—which was estimated last year at 5 per cent.—turned out to be 8 per cent. because of inflation.

Is not it clear that the promised increase in public spending announced this time last year did not materialise? The public know that. That is why they know that the services on which they depend have not improved—that teacher shortages are increasing, and hospital waiting lists are at record levels. Do not the Government's own figures about the effects of inflation on the projected increases for the year to come show that those figures corroborate the experience of all our constituents in relation to public services? Does the Chancellor think that it was a bit much to talk in his autumn statement about protecting the "vulnerable groups in society", given the Government's position on child benefit, which was announced only a few weeks ago?

Will the Chancellor explain the cuts in the Department of the Environment budget? There appear to be cuts in the total, although the text that he read out mentions increases. Will he say whether less will be spent next year than is currently being spent on water, environment and the countryside?

Will the Chancellor tell us who invented the word "rooflessness"? Is it meant to be a synonym for being homeless? Was the word introduced because Ministers and the Chancellor cannot bring themselves to talk about the state of homelessness that they have caused for so many people in this country?

The Chancellor made some predictions. Has he reflected on the record of the Treasury at making successful economic predictions? I assume that he has read the Treasury bulletin issued recently which confirms that in 1988 the Treasury was wrong by 288 per cent. about the balance of payments; in 1989, it was 30 per cent. wrong about the balance of payments; and in 1990, 20 per cent. wrong—[HON. MEMBERS: "Getting better."] Getting better, certainly, but there is still a long way to go. Conservative Members clutch at any crumb of comfort, but if they find these figures comfortable they need to think again.

On inflation, the prediction in 1988 turned out to be 62 per cent. wrong; in 1989, it turned out to be 38 per cent. wrong; and in 1990, it turned out to be 40 per cent. wrong. All the same, inflation kept peaking and blipping along while these errors were being made.

Does the Chancellor recall coming to the House last year with his autumn statement and saying that inflation now would be 5·25 per cent? And what is it? It is 11 per cent. The Government keep making predictions that lack credibility. Does the right hon. Gentleman understand that this is the fifth occasion on which the Government have predicted a fall in inflation? Why should we believe this one any more than the others? And since the right hon. Gentleman is predicting a fall in the headline rate, will he tell us what will happen to the underlying rate? What will be the underlying rate in the fourth quarter of next year?

We have received uncertain predictions from the Government and they have usually turned out to be incorrect. We have received poor policies and poor purposes. The most disturbing aspect of the autumn statement was the Chancellor's statement that there will be no change in economic policies. It was those economic policies which got us where we are now and they will make matters worse until they are changed.

Mr. Major: I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will forgive me for saying at the outset that that was an odd response from the shadow Chancellor, who keeps telling the markets that he would spend money only on child benefit and pensions. He produced a litany of areas on which the Labour party clearly thinks that it

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would be wise to spend a lot more money. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. and learned Gentleman is clearly sensitive about the deep split between himself and the shadow Chief Secretary on these matters.

Let me deal first with the questions that the right hon. and learned Gentleman asked. He made a point about recession. He used the word in the way most calculated to alarm—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the questions."] I will come to the specific points in a moment. The right hon. and learned Gentleman's use of the word recession conjured up an image quite different from the reality of what is happening or is expected to happen in future.

It is perfectly true that output will decline for a brief period during the second half of this year——

Mr. John Smith: And the first half of next year.

Mr. Major: —and during the first quarter of next year, but if the right hon. and learned Gentleman will listen for a moment he will hear, first, that it declines from a very high level. We shall be back into growth next year at an accelerating rate. Inflation will fall, savings will increase, the trade gap will close and investment will be 50 per cent. higher than in 1979. We shall still have more people in employment than any other European nation. It is clear from what is happening and from what I have been able to forecast today that the British economy is coming back on track—that is what the right hon. and learned Gentleman does not like—*[Interruption.]* The Leader of the Opposition is occasionally wont to express the view from the Dispatch Box that he is glad that television is here. I hope that it is here at the moment to witness the way in which right hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench are behaving.

In terms of investment, the past three years have seen both a record rise in total investment and in business investment and I quoted the figures a few moments ago on the difference in 1979. The fall next year will be modest and from a very high level.

There is certainly a redirection within the employment programme which is broadly unchanged in cash terms. The Government will be spending more than £2½ billion on training enterprise and vocational education. The savings on employment training have been made following a reappraisal of what employment training is delivering and there will be improved job clubs and other facilities as an alternative, and a considerable degree of extra resources and extra choice for training and enterprise councils in future.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to child benefit and the vulnerable. He knows as well as anyone in the House that on each occasion that child benefit was not increased, extra resources were put into child scale rates and income support to more than make up the difference.

There is an increase in the environment budget of about £180 million in 1991-92 for the White Paper policies despite the fact that this is a very tight year for the survey. It is perfectly clear that although at the moment we find ourselves in the most difficult part of the economic cycle, we can now see our way through it and out of it during the course of next year.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House knows that this matter may be discussed in our debate on the Loyal Address specifically tomorrow and again next week. Hon. Members should ask single questions, please.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this is a very tight public expenditure settlement and that both he and my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury are to be congratulated? Although the pundits in the media and the press have been saying that there will be an overshoot of £12 billion on public expenditure, if we ignore the reserves there is an overshoot of only £4·5 billion. Despite our difficulties, more and more money is being spent on capital projects, unlike what happened under the last Labour Government who reduced public expenditure on the national health service and roads. Is not it about time that the Opposition stopped talking down Britain and our economy?

Mr. Major: In his latter remarks, my right hon. Friend asked for more than is likely to be delivered. It is perfectly true that to many commentators this will be a surprisingly tight package. It keeps public spending at £200 billion when many expected larger increases. The share of expenditure in national income remains unchanged when I think that many expected at this stage of the cycle that it might increase. As I said earlier, we still expect a substantial debt repayment in the present fiscal year. It is a tight settlement and it was necessary to be a tight settlement. We will continue to keep tight control of public expenditure.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Is not it clear that when we strip away the skilful and ingenious presentation, this statement amounts to cuts in many areas and inadequate investment in the key areas of transport, training and education because the Government must fund the massive inflation that they have caused and also because the Chancellor still has to leave room for the kind of income tax cuts that the Prime Minister keeps talking about without abandoning all semblance of fiscal respectability? Will the Chancellor confirm that the underlying rate of inflation will remain high throughout next year? Will he confirm that inflation minus mortgage interest rates will be high throughout next year? Is not that a serious problem and what is the Chancellor going to do about it?

Mr. Major: I expect underlying inflation also to fall next year—[HON. MEMBERS: "How far?"] To broadly the level of the headline rate.

With regard to the programmes to which the hon. Gentleman referred, I have already said that something in excess of £½ billion is being added to the education budget largely to finance the very dramatic increase in the number of students in higher education. The plans imply at least as much capital spending in schools and colleges next year as in the current year.

As there have been huge increases on transport in each of the last two surveys, the priority on transport this year is the extra almost £600 million mainly for the Jubilee line extension, the east-west crossrail and services for the channel tunnel. It is a very good settlement for public transport, for we are determined to produce an efficient and effective public transport service.

Mr. Terence L. Higgins (Worthing): Although it is very important for the long-term trend of public expenditure to decline as a percentage of national income, does my right hon. Friend agree that the primary role of the rate of interest must now be to keep sterling within the limits of the exchange rate mechanism and that, as a result, fiscal policy has become more important than ever? Against the present economic background, are not the increases in planned public expenditure which my right hon. Friend has announced entirely appropriate if we are to avoid the dangers of recession? In that context, is not the increase in transport expenditure which my right hon. Friend has just announced particularly appropriate?

Mr. Major: I see my right hon. Friend's point. He is, of course, entirely right about the necessity of remaining within the bands in the exchange rate mechanism to which we are committed, and equally entirely right that we will need to keep a very firm control of the trend rate of public expenditure in future years.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): May I press the Chancellor further on the underlying rate of inflation? When the underlying rate was less than the RPI, the Government made a great deal of it. Now that it is likely to be more than the RPI, may we have his forecast of the underlying rate of inflation, excluding mortgage interest, at the end of next year, the fourth quarter?

Mr. Major: As the right hon. Gentleman knows—he is a very distinguished former Treasury Minister—the underlying rate of inflation has never been published, for perfectly understandable reasons.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): What happened to my right hon. Friend's forecast last year for the surplus on invisibles and to his belief that negative growth in GDP would be avoided this year? If his forecasts this year go even slightly astray, just how disinflationary will £200 billion of spending be? Are not there lesssons to be learnt from 1973-74?

Mr. Major: We do have a surplus on invisibles this year, and I would expect there to be a surplus on invisibles next year. The underlying premise of my hon. Friend's question is perhaps inaccurate.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North): Does the Chancellor of the Exchequer agree that, as the planned spending total to a large extent reflects the Government's failure to control inflation and the mess over the poll tax, there will be little room for improvements in vital public services? Will not the increase in the public spending total actually disturb the markets? In other words, are not we in danger of getting the worst of all worlds—disturbing the markets without satisfying the public?

Mr. Major: Of course, if the markets listen to the hon. Gentleman that would undoubtedly be the case. I suspect that the markets will notice that we have kept very tight control of expenditure in the circumstances that prevail, and I think that the markets will welcome the fact that we have been able to do so. It is clearly important that we do.

Mr. Ian Stewart (Hertfordshire, North): Now that my right hon. Friend has announced the first part of his budgetary package on public expenditure and has shown very welcome restraint on the public expenditure totals, when the time comes will he be equally austere in presenting his Budget in the spring, because a tight fiscal policy is the best foundation for restoring economic growth?

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his early budgetary representation which I will consider with great care.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): As the 1992 planning forecast has now increased by 4 per cent. and it is intended to increase that total by 7·5 per cent. the following year and by 5 per cent. the year after, does the Chancellor expect those increased sums to be met from the Revenue or will he dip once more into the public borrowing requirement?

Mr. Major: No, I am not at this stage anticipating a public borrowing requirement. As I indicated in my statement, our medium-term policy is to remain at nothing worse than balance in terms of public borrowing. I hope that we will keep to that fiscal balance. We have a surplus this year, against the expectations of many commentators.

Mr. Tim Smith (Beaconsfield): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statement today on public expenditure is most welcome because he has succeeded in containing the increase in spending below that necessary to accommodate inflation while at the same time providing substantial additional resources for priority programmes? Does not the substantial increase in cash spending next year show that urgent need to continue to press down on inflation? Will my right hon. Friend continue to take a tough stance on monetary and fiscal policy?

Mr. Major: I entirely agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said and see no reason to add to it. I could not have expressed it as well myself.

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): The Chancellor's statement suggested that he is still aware of the volatility of oil prices. However, is he aware that today there has been a reported 70 per cent. increase to £1·1 billion in the profits of the Shell oil company? It is therefore reasonable to deduce that there will be comparable increases for other oil companies. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the volatility of oil prices is beneficial for the oil companies, but that higher prices for oil buyers, such as motorists and industry, are disadvantageous? Does he agree that a lower profit margin and a more reasonable price would remove one element that has a serious impact on inflation, which so concerns the House at the moment?

Mr. Major: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that point has been examined by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. The hon. Gentleman is right that the volatility of oil prices represents a damaging uncertainty for the projections that we and other countries must make. It is for that reason that I have taken the assumption, similar to that taken in many other forecasts, of an oil price that will be down to $25 by the end of 1991.

Mr. Anthony Nelson (Chichester): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Conservative Members fully support the content as well as the style and tone of his statement? Will he also accept our congratulations to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on showing clear political judgment in giving a priority to increased health spending? However, does he agree that if we are to increase expenditure on such areas—as we must—at a time when

[Mr. Anthony Nelson]

our constituents are having to tighten their belts, it would be quite improper to face them with an increased burden of taxation next year?

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind remarks to both myself and my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary. As he knows, I believe that my right hon. Friend has produced a remarkably successful outturn to the public expenditure round. I believe that it is important to sustain expenditure on health and, on this occasion, we have managed to increase it in real terms by 5 per cent. again. I note my hon. Friend's point about taxation, but, as he knows, I must consider that only in the period between now and the Budget.

Mr. John Fraser (Norwood): With "rooflessness", as the right hon. Gentleman calls it, going through the roof, how many extra homes for rent will be provided by the public sector as a result of this statement?

Mr. Major: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment will be making that clear in his own statement.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, South-West): Since my right hon. Friend is promising very substantial increases in public expenditure, will he confirm that there will be room for either substantial cuts in interest rates when it is safe to do that, or for cuts in taxation, but not for both?

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is well aware that I cannot comment on the prospects of taxation, and I have no intention of doing so. I will not cut interest rates until I am absolutely satisfied that it is safe and secure to do so.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Am I correct in thinking that the Chancellor has assumed £2,700 million in oil revenues for the current year, bringing to a round £90,000 million the total by which Scottish oil revenues have bankrolled the Government in the past 10 years? What has happened to the additional North sea revenues as a result of the higher oil prices which, according to the brokers' forecasts, are running at £20 million per day? How much of that has gone to the oil companies and how much to the Chancellor? I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will appreciate the anxiety of people in Scotland to find out the answer to that question today, given the announcement of further steel closures and the further abandonment of North sea steel markets to the Japanese and the Germans.

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman did not, of course, put the reverse point to me some time ago when oil revenues fell dramatically after accidents in the North sea. He should look at both sides of the equation . Oil revenues are important to the Exchequer, but they represent a relatively small element of income.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Does my right hon. Friend accept that many of us have been disturbed at what we have read in the papers, which we always believe, that the Government are dismantling the health service? How is it, then, that we are told that we will spend £3·2 billion more this year? If that is dismantling the health service, what would we have to spend if we were trying to improve it?

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his most helpful observation. It is certainly the case that, on any measure, expenditure on the health service has risen dramatically over recent years to accommodate not only an improving service, freely available operations which previously were not available, and more doctors, nurses and dentists but a general improvement, as well as the largest capital building programme for hospitals that we have ever known.

Ms. Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): Does the Chancellor accept that the figures that he announced on the extra money that he is lavishing on the health service do not mean much except in the context of the outturn figure of inflation and the relative price effect? As the Chancellor will know, the health service as a whole has a higher rate of inflation than the rest of the economy. That point was made by the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee in its report on last year's autumn statement.

Mr. Major: The relative price effect in health may conceivably—statisticians disagree—add about 1 per cent. over the normal GDP deflator. On that basis there is still a large real increase in health spending yet again next year.

Mrs. Elizabeth Peacock (Batley and Spen): I heard my right hon. Friend say that investment is slowing down, but is he aware of investment that has recently taken place, is now taking place and is planned to take place in the near future in manufacturing industry in Yorkshire? Is not that a sign of great confidence in the future of manufacturing and our country?

Mr. Major: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. There has been a considerable degree of investment in manufacturing in the past few years. Equally as important as the quantum of investment has been the quality and nature of the investment that we have seen during the past few years.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is not it true that any old Chancellor can reduce inflation if he is prepared to kick people out of work and reduce consumption by in effect strangling the whole economy? Is not the real art to reduce inflation by keeping people in work and maintaining demand? Why does not the Chancellor pursue such a strategy? Is that not in the national interest?

Mr. Major: How curious it is, in view of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, that we have more of our population in work than any other nation in Europe.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on resisting the demands of the Opposition and, indeed, some of his colleagues, for higher expenditure? Is he aware that by continuing to run a budget surplus and repay the national debt he is doing a great service to our children and grandchildren? He mentioned wage increases. Does he agree that the public sector must set an example this year if we are to bring down inflation as quickly as we hope?

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right about the repayment of the historic national debt which, by the end of this year, will have amounted to about £29 billion over the past four years. Consequently, there has been a considerable year-on-year saving in interest which

will no longer have to be paid on that debt. My hon. Friend is right about the need to restrain wage increases generally.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): The Chancellor will recall that a couple of weeks ago he was a most unwelcome guest in my constituency [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] While he was dining at the Grand hotel with the chairman of the Conservative association, did the chairman tell him that the current waiting list for hip operations in Leicestershire was 29 weeks? As a result of the Chancellor's grand proposals, how much less will people have to wait for operations in Leicestershire?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman is too gracious in his welcome. The chairman of the Conservative association did mention that in the period up to 1979 there were virtually no hip operations anywhere in the national health service.

Mr. Yeo: Would it be fair to characterise my right hon. Friend's statement as one that puts teachers and textbooks before tax and patients before prisons? Has the achievement of containing public spending in real terms at the same time as directing resources to those highly desirable areas been made possible by the success of the Government's policies over the past decade in defence and law and order?

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is entirely right. He certainly analyses the autumn statement correctly. Had it not been for the staunch and successful way in which the Government decided to station cruise missiles two or three years ago and the effects that followed from that, I doubt whether we could safely have reduced defence expenditure today.

Mr. Skinner: Why does the Chancellor of the Exchequer come to the House of Commons with nothing less than a cock and bull story? During the past 11 years, the Government have accumulated more than £120 billion in extra revenue through privatisation and North sea oil revenues. As a result of those 11 years, we now have a public sector debt repayment which, according to him, will be only £3 billion next year and will disappear from view the following year, a trade balance of £15 billion and invisibles that are almost invisible, whereas they used to amount to £700 million a month. No wonder he says that the economy must be put back on track. He is running an economy that is off the rails.

Mr. Major: I am bound to say that a PSDR of only £3 billion was not a beast that I recall during the period of the Labour Government. The hon. Gentleman referred to a cock and bull story. We know which of those he talks.

Mr. Richard Alexander (Newark): My right hon. Friend told the House the total amount of saving in the national debt which will be achieved as a result of this statement. How much saving to income tax payers will be represented by the fact that they no longer have to pay the interest payments on that capital sum?

Mr. Major: It will be a considerable sum. I cannot give my hon. Friend a precise answer, but we are talking about approximately £2·5 billion a year which is perhaps equivalent to 1p or 1·5p on the standard rate of income tax.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer comment on the claimed increase in what he might describe as "bedlessness" in that, by next April, 3,500 hospital beds will close to comply with the Government's "finance first and patients last" policy? What effect will today's statement and the closure of those hospital beds have on waiting lists next year? Will they stay the same, increase or decrease?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman should perhaps look at the whole question in the round. The cash increase for the hospital and community health services budget was more than 10 per cent. in 1990-91. Even on the basis of health service inflation, which the hon. Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) mentioned, that is a substantial increase over and above inflation. The same health authorities to which the hon. Gentleman referred are also planning to spend more than £220 million on service developments. If there are volume increases on that scale, I see no reason for the shortfall to which he refers.

Mr. Michael Morris (Northampton, South): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on giving the House such a clear financial strategy, which contrasts with the questioning from Opposition Benches. May I congratulate him on a realistic planning total for reserves? To return to the welcome 5 per cent. real increase in health expenditure, will he say whether the planning total on which this is based is at least no lower than the planning total for the current year?

Mr. Major: Yes, I can certainly confirm that it is a 5 per cent. real increase. It is there specifically to reflect the priority that we give to health. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his early remarks, particularly those about the increase in reserves. With the present uncertainties, it is wise to increase them to £3½ billion, £7 billion and £10½ billion respectively. Events may yet show that.

Mr. Wareing: Is not the Chancellor of the Exchequer misleading the House when he tells us that, despite tight control of public expenditure, vulnerable people are to be protected? How does he justify a cut in Government grant for the first time in history to the Royal National Institute for the Blind to assist it with the production of braille material? How long will it be before people, such as blind people, are not expected to bail the Government out of the economic mess for which they are responsible? Who is responsible for that decision and what is the justification for it?

Mr. Major: The answer to whether I am misleading is categorically no. The hon. Gentleman asked about the blind. He would do well to reflect upon the changes that I made in the Budget specifically to help people with that most distressing ailment.

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): The Chancellor will doubtless agree that if the claims of every organisation in the country which said that it was underfunded were met, the Chief Secretary would be coming before the House with a claim for about 60 per cent. of the national income rather than the figure that he has announced. The Chancellor told us that the increase in output in real terms is likely to be 2 per cent. and probably not much more in the foreseeable future. Against that, those very expensive organisations —the national health service and local government—have

[Sir Ian Lloyd]

received increases of just over £5·5 billion or 5 per cent. in real terms. If those claims are met in real terms which sectors of the economy will pay for them in real terms?

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is right about the inevitable claims that could be placed upon the public purse, often for quite legitimate schemes which, if the resources were available, one would be pleased to meet. The substantial increase for health and local government is at the expense of other areas in which we have been able to make savings and, of course, at the expense of a smaller debt repayment than might otherwise have been the case.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Will the Chancellor confirm that, despite his words about protecting the most vulnerable groups in society, his statement contains no additional community charge resources for northern metropolitan boroughs such as St. Helens? Does he agree that any system that gives the borough of Westminster twice as much money per child to care for children at risk from abuse and poverty than it gives to children in St. Helens is corrupt and indefensible?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman has uncharacteristically overlooked the enormous increase of £2·5 billion made available to cushion community charge payers, often from unjustified levels of expenditure. He has equally uncharacteristically forgotten the £3 billion increase in social security that is specifically to help vulnerable people.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): I congratulate my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary on striking an extremely skilful balance in achieving a £200 billion public expenditure outturn. Does my right hon. Friend agree that in the fight against inflation there is a trade-off between the public sector surplus or net debt repayment and private sector savings? In that context, one of the most encouraging features of the past few months has been the rise in the household sector savings ratio. Does he agree that that will continue to play a key role in the fight against inflation?

Mr. Major: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. The savings ratio has increased significantly over the past year as a result of increased savings and reduced borrowing. I hope that that trend will continue because it is greatly in all our interests for it to do so.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): The Chancellor said that there was central Government provision for the poll tax of about £3,000 million. He also said that the poll tax had helped to double the retail prices index from last year's forecast of 5·75 per cent. to 11 per cent. He also accepted that local government borrowing had been higher because of the slow collection rate of the poll tax. Is it any wonder that the poll tax is as unpopular today as it was when it was introduced?

Mr. Major: The community charge added 1 per cent. to the retail prices index. The hon. Gentleman is entirely correct about that. However, it was not so much the community charge itself but the increasing level of expenditure reflected in a high community charge that added to the retail prices index. It is difficult to avoid the fact that in the first year of the community charge there was a quite unprecedented increase in local authority expenditure. That was because many local authorities took the opportunity on the introduction of the charge to increase their expenditure in the hope of blaming the Government for it.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): Will my right hon. Friend remind the House what happened to the ratio of public expenditure to national income in previous periods of slower growth and what were the consequences for inflation?

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend touches on an important point. Both in this country and elsewhere, at times in the cycle similar to that in which we now find ourselves, the ratio of public expenditure tended to rise dramatically with an impact on taxation and frequently on inflation, too.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): The Chancellor seems to strike a rather complacent note on the creation of jobs. Will he confirm that a very much larger proportion of the jobs created in Britain in the past few years has been casual, low paid and part time—far more casual, low paid and part time than the jobs created in our main competitor countries?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman is correct in that some, but not all, of the jobs are indeed part time, but that reflects many people's demand to work part time. They are now able to satisfy themselves on that count as they were previously unable to do. Whichever way one examines the labour market, we have a significantly higher percentage of our population in work than any other European nation, including Germany.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Am I right in thinking that we are spending a lot more on education —that in fact education has done rather well out of this statement? But do we have systems in place that will ensure that the money is spent—especially in counties such as Derbyshire—on improving the quality of education and the physical fabric of our schools and not, as it is at the moment, with excessive administration expense, on free newspapers, educational advisers who have nothing to do with education, and subsidised baked beans for school meals?

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is quite correct. The figure of £520 million which I quoted earlier was the central Government increase. There is also a significant increase in local government spending in education, a large part of which is financed by the aggregate external finance settlement.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Does not the very elegant Treasury prose which the Chancellor read so beautifully—especially the part that said that the higher than expected inflation had not been allowed to feed through into Government public spending—disguise the fact that, never mind any improvements for the very vulnerable in our society, the health service and others will have to make cuts simply to keep pace with current demands?

Mr. Major: No, it does not. I illustrated to the House where the savings had been made to provide increased resources for the vulnerable; for education, social security and health. I set out where those savings had come from. So the hon. Gentleman's premise is, I fear, inaccurate.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Although I warmly welcome the additional resources allocated to

health, education and infrastructure in the announcement made by my right hon. Friend this afternoon, does he agree that manufacturing industry is the only genuine source of non-inflationary economic growth and that he would be able to allocate even more resources to those deserving and necessary areas if interest rates came down and if manufacturing industry could play a more positive and productive role in the economy?

Mr. Major: As my hon. Friend knows, the thrust of the Government's present fiscal and monetary stance is to move to a position where we can see inflation falling significantly which will open the possibility, when it is safe and secure to do so, to reduce interest rates. I shall certainly do that, but not, alas, until I am convinced that it is safe and secure to do so. To do so prematurely would not be in the interests of manufacturing industry or of any other part of the economy.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): The Chancellor forecast that he would receive £5·5 billion from the proceeds of privatisation. He is going to repay national debt to the tune of £3 billion. If he was producing a balance sheet, would not he have to show that he is using £2·5 billion to subsidise the programme for the year ahead and that he will end up with £5·5 billion less in assets? What will he do when there is no more family silver to sell?

Mr. Major: The £5·5 billion is next year and the £3 billion is this year. If we were borrowing at the rate at which the last Labour Government borrowed, there would be a £50 billion borrowing requirement.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. A very important foreign affairs debate will follow the autumn statement. I wonder whether, exceptionally, I could have an arrangement with those hon. Members who are standing. If I call them on the autumn statement, may I ask them not to rise on the business statement?

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): My right hon. Friend's allocation of resources to health, transport and education will be particularly welcomed in my constituency and in London generally. As we are not allowed by the rules of the House to question the Opposition on the various intemperate promises that they have dangled before the public, will my right hon. Friend speculate on how a Labour Government could possibly pay for the kind of promises that the Opposition have made? What extra taxation and borrowing would be needed?

Mr. Major: They would not, of course, pay. My hon. Friend and other taxpayers would pay. I am not sure that Mr. Speaker's ruling is quite so welcome to me as it is to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House.

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the concern about global environmental issues, overseas aid and the work of the BBC's overseas service. Will he confirm that his statement means that these important British programmes will be both safeguarded and extended?

Mr. Major: I can confirm that there is to be an increase in resources for the BBC world service. On the environment, I referred earlier to the increase of £180 million.

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): Will my right hon. Friend reflect on the contribution made by the motor industry to the achievement of his targets in the autumn statement? It has expanded employment and radically improved the balance of trade. When he makes his Budget judgment will he bear the industry's contribution in mind?

Mr. Major: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his early representations. It is true that the turnround in the motor industry's performance in recent years has been remarkable.

Mr. Peter Thurnham (Bolton, North-East): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on a tight and financially prudent package, but will he confirm that he has also been able fully to protect those groups that are particularly vulnerable to inflation?

Mr. Major: As I said in my statement, the £3 billion increase in social security is intended specifically to ensure that that occurs. I believe, therefore, that I can give to my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks.

Mr. James Paice (Cambridgeshire, South-East): While, Mr. Chairman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Mr. Chairman?"] One has waited so long, Mr. Speaker, one forgets.

Mr. Speaker: It is lucky that I do not forget, is it not?

Mr. Paice: My right hon. Friend's statement, which included extra expenditure on a range of important services, is welcome, but does he agree that he would have been able to give far more within the same planning total had it not been for the profligacy of local government? Does he also agree that those who call for extra expenditure should direct their criticism at authorities that waste money in the belief that by providing jobs they are in some way helping? Instead they should provide cost-effective services.

Mr. Major: My hon. Friend is entirely right. When he has an opportunity to examine in detail the figures that I shall publish next week, he will see that we have had to squeeze central Government expenditure to accommodate the local government expenditure overrun.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Can my right hon. Friend confirm that had he been making his announcement today with the same proportion of gross domestic product available to him in tax revenue as the last Labour Government enjoyed, his total expenditure would have been short by some £18 billion? Can he also confirm that this remarkable achievement has come about during the lifetime of this Government, even though there have been falling tax rates?

Mr. Major: I can certainly confirm that, but I cannot confirm the precise figure. I have no reason, however, to suspect that my hon. Friend's figure is inaccurate. There have been falling tax rates. The only reason why the tax burden has not fallen, relatively, is that the last Labour Government had a borrowing requirement and did not tax honestly for their expenditure.

Business of the House

4.9 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): As the House is aware, the debate on the Address in reply to the Gracious Speech will be brought to a conclusion on Wednesday 14 November.

With permission, I should like to make a statement about the business for the remainder of next week:

THURSDAY 15 NOVEMBER—Motion to take note of EC documents on indirect tax rate proposals, technical proposals for VAT, statistics and mutual assistance, and technical proposals for the control of excise movements. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

Motion to take note of EC documents on the conservation of fishing resources and improvements to structures in the fisheries and aquaculture sector. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

FRIDAY 16 NOVEMBER—There will be a debate on road safety on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Statutory Sick Pay Bill.

[Thursday 15 November

(1) Relevant European Community Documents

(a) 6762/89	*Indirect Taxes: Harmonisation*
(b) 9775/89, 9776/89, 9777/89, 9778/89	*Excise Duty Rates*
(c) 6641/90	*Value Added Tax*
(d) 6725/90	*Trade Statistics*
(e) 8801/90	*Trade Statistics*
(f) 6642/90	*Indirect Taxes (Administrative Co-operation)*
(g) COM(90) 430, COM(90) 431, COM(90) 432, COM(90) 433, COM(90) 434	*Excise duties: Regime and Structure*

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 15-xxxii (1988-89)
(b) HC 11-xi (1989-90)
(c) HC 11-xxxi (1989-90)
(d) HC 11-xxxi (1989-90)
(e) Not yet reported on
(f) HC 11-xxxi (1989-90)
(g) HC 11-xxxiii (1989-90)

(2) Relevant European Community Documents:

(a) 8317/90	*Fisheries: Technical Conservation measures*
(b) 8240/90	*Fisheries and Aquaculture: Structural Improvements*

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee

(a) HC 11-xxxii (1989-90)
(b) HC 11-xxxii (1989-90).]

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): May I warmly congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment as Lord President and Leader of the House? Is it safe to assume that he was quite happy not to be designated deputy Prime Minister, given the fate of his predecessor? We regret the departure of the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) from his position as Leader of the House. I believe not only that he wanted to reform and modernise the House and its procedures but that he sought always to carry the House with him in what he was seeking to do. I place on record our appreciation of that. However, I certainly wish the new Leader of the House well in his new position.

May I reiterate my request for an oral statement at the earliest opportunity on the implications of the Cullen inquiry into the Piper Alpha disaster? Will the Leader of the House accept that the comments of certain oil companies on North sea oil safety requirements and request from employees sit ill beside the statement today that Shell profits have increased by 70 per cent? Are the Government content with that level of profit taking by oil companies in all the circumstances of the Gulf crisis? Can we have a statement on that subject, too, from the Secretary of State for Energy? I believe that many people in Britain will be angry, given the increases in prices that they have had to face, to learn that profits have increased by 70 per cent. No doubt similar profit increases will be reflected when other companies announce their returns.

Finally, are the Government happy about the proposed merger of Sky Television and British Satellite Broadcasting? Are not there some serious consequences for broadcasting in Britain in that proposed merger? Can we have a statement at the earliest opportunity about the proposal from the appropriate Minister, who I understand is the Secretary of State for the Home Department?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind remarks about me and for his welcome. I am particularly grateful for the tribute he paid to my predecessor, in which I should like to join, for all the work that he did in the reform and modernisation of the House and in so many other ways while he was Leader of the House. I look forward to co-operating with the hon. Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) in dealing will all matters that are of interest and benefit to the House, including reform and modernisation.

I note the hon. Gentleman's request about Piper Alpha and I know that he raised the matter with my predecessor. I can confirm that it is the intention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy to make a statement in the near future. I hope that that will be next week. As we have an important debate today, he will forgive me if I do not comment on his particular remarks about the oil industry, but I shall convey the issues he has raised to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy.

On the question of Sky Television, the creation of British Sky Broadcasting offers the prospect of a satellite service capable of operating on a profitable basis and offering real competition for terrestrial broadcasters and quality and choice for the viewer. That prospect is entirely consistent with the Government's broadcasting objectives. I understand that the Office of Fair Trading is currently considering whether the merger raises issues that might warrant its recommending a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission. I shall convey the hon. Gentleman's request to my right hon. Friend.

Mr. Robin Squire (Hornchurch): Conservative Members and, I suspect, hon. Members in general will join me in congratulating my right hon. Friend on his elevation and wish him well in the post. Has he had time to consider the implications of the absence of a debate on the

environment in the Loyal Address, given that such debates are determined by the Opposition? As a result, does he conclude that presumably the Labour party sees no advantage in debating the environment because of the Government's excellent record? Will he therefore take early steps to arrange such a debate?

Mr. MacGregor: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks about me. As he rightly says, debates on the Queen's Speech are chosen by the Opposition. I agree that they must recognise that we are carrying forward the most powerful and constructive proposals on the environment. I cannot say when we shall be able to have an early debate.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I again draw the attention of the House to the fact that we have a very important debate later? I ask that questions be particularly directed to business next week and not general topics. Hon. Members who were not part of my deal but who nevertheless were called might bear it in mind that other hon. Members wish to speak later in the debate.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept my congratulations on his elevation to the dignified office that he now holds? I am glad to hear that he will continue the modernising and reforming ways of his predecessor. He will no doubt make a good start as a Scot if one of his early achievements is the establishment of a Scottish Select Committee. As a former Agriculture Minister, he must be aware of much concern among farmers, not least with falling prices and higher costs, about the implications of the 30 per cent. reduction in subsidies which was agreed at this week's European Council meeting. May we have a statement next week from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in which he could fully explain what was decided at that meeting and the implications in the shorter and longer term for British farming?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's kind remarks. I am aware that there is much interest in the discussions that took place in Brussels and obviously it is an important issue. I cannot promise when we shall be able to discuss it, but I shall convey the hon. Gentleman's remarks to my right hon. Friend. I am willing to consider the possibility of a debate on the general GATT issues, of which agriculture is a prominent part.

Mr. David Sumberg (Bury, South): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the mounting traffic chaos in Greater Manchester as a result of the guards' strike at Piccadilly station? Will he have a word with our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport so that we can have a statement on the matter next week, which would allow Conservative Members to express the outrage of our constituents at the considerable inconvenience that is being caused by those activities to their lives, their businesses and all aspects of commercial life in the north-west?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise a statement next week, but I shall draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of the Secretary of State. My hon. Friend has already made clear his own views about the matter.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): The Leader of the House will be aware of the anguish of people with haemophilia who were infected with the AIDS virus in the course of NHS treatment. He will know that more than 130 have already died and that 1,000 more lives are threatened. May we have a statement next week on this appalling tragedy, more especially in view of Mr. Justice Ognall's plea for an out-of-court settlement of a case which, he says, is bringing the law into disrepute? Why cannot we follow the humane example of Canada and West Germany?

Mr. MacGregor: My right hon. and learned Friend the former Secretary of State for Health has made the Government's position clear on many occasions. We have always accepted the strong moral argument in favour of haemophiliacs, which is why we made £34 million available for ex gratia payments, and we promise to keep that figure under review.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May we have a debate next week on fair employment policies, so that the House can investigate the finding of an industrial tribunal in Ealing of blatant racism by the former Labour Ealing council, in its failure to employ Mr. Terry Deane in its housing department, and the bad race relations of that council?

Mr. MacGregor: If my hon. Friend manages to catch your eye, Mr. Speaker, he can elaborate further on his views on this matter in the debate on the Queen's Speech in the next week.

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): We on this Bench offer our sincere congratulations and good wishes to the right hon. Gentleman on his appointment to his present post. Does he recall that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland told the Procedure Committee that there was no need for a Select Committee on Northern Ireland because he hoped to establish devolved government shortly? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the proposal has been completely torpedoed by others, so the need for that Select Committee grows with each passing day? Will he carefully consider making a statement next week about setting up such a Committee?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the hon. Member for his remarks. I have not yet been able to brief myself on a number of matters that come within my sphere of responsibility, and this is clearly one. However, I cannot promise a statement next week.

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that Thursday's business, which deals with fisheries management, will not be the only opportunity before the end of the year for the House to discuss the important issue of fishing?

Mr. MacGregor: There may be other opportunities, but next Thursday is an important opportunity for hon. Members who have various fisheries points that they want to raise to do so.

Mr. William McKelvey (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I welcome the right hon. Gentleman, as a fellow Scot, to his new job. As a Scot, will he look at the report by the Procedure Committee—if not the whole report, at least that paragraph dealing with the fact that it is his duty to see that a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs comes about? I do not wish to tell the right hon. Gentleman his duty, because I am sure that he will carry out his duty as

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a Scot. Will he look at the possibility, through whatever channels, of setting up a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs? The House desperately needs to look into Scotland's affairs. Had we had a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, perhaps the debate which we are shortly to have on the collapse of the steel industry might not have been necessary.

Mr. MacGregor: I am, of course, aware that this matter has a considerable background. I am aware also that we Scots are very tenacious—[HON. MEMBERS: "Wee Scots?"] —"We Scots", with one "e". This matter has already been raised with me, and it is clearly one which I shall wish to consider.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): May I also welcome my right hon. Friend to his new job? I am sure that the House understands me when I say that education's loss will prove to be the gain of the House. When may we have a debate on grant-maintained schools? My right hon. Friend will be particularly aware that it is difficult for grant-maintained schools to emerge. The process should be much simplified.

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am very proud to have played my part in helping to carry forward the Government's major reforms of the education system which are promoting choice and greatly improving standards. There will be an opportunity to discuss grant-maintained schools in Tuesday's debate on education and training. That is one of the opportunities that I had hoped to have to defend the Government's educational programme robustly and to reveal the deficiencies of the Opposition's policies.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): I, too, welcome the right hon. Gentleman to his new job—a very nice little number and not very demanding. For him, of course, it is a welcome relief—no more mad cows, no more mad teachers, just mad Members asking things of no great import. Of course, longevity is not part of the job either.

I very much welcome next week's debate on fishing. Although whales are not fish but mammals, will we have a statement next week by a responsible Minister protesting about the slaughter of porpoises and dolphins by the Japanese and the launch, again, of their whaling fleet into the Antarctic? This is an important matter; I hope that the right hon. Gentleman can arrange for us to have a debate on animal conservation with particular reference to whales.

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I hope that he will ensure that my current job is less demanding, at least in terms of the pressures that he puts on me. However, I cannot promise a debate on those matters next week, because we have a full programme, but I shall certainly bear his points in mind.

Mr. Gary Waller (Keighley): I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 1 on the future of the multi-fibre arrangement.

[That this House acknowledging that trade cannot be free unless it is also fair, is unwilling to contemplate a timetable for phasing out the Multi-Fibre Arrangement without the coming into effect of a General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade agreement incorporating greatly strengthened enforceable rules and disciplines and the elimination of barriers to United Kingdom textile and clothing exports.]

Is my hon. Friend aware that 480,000 people are still employed in the textile and clothing industries? Is he aware that many of them are concerned about the meeting which will be held at the beginning of December by European Community Ministers to negotiate their stance on the Uruguay round of GATT, and that they are worried that Britain appears to be moving towards a much less robust position than that taken by many of our partners on linkage between the phasing out of the MFA and a much tougher and enforceable GATT? Could my right hon. Friend arrange for a debate before the beginning of December so that these views can be forcefully expressed?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware of the views on the matter previously expressed in the House. I must point out to my hon. Friend that it has always been known that ending the multi-fibre arrangement is an essential part of the general lowering of trade barriers by all parties which we are pursuing in the Uruguay round. I am considering whether we can find time to have a debate on the GATT Uruguay round before the time to which my hon. Friend has referred.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I welcome the debate on fisheries next week. However, I ask that it is not used as an excuse not to have a debate in December when the quota allocations for next year are known. Does the Leader of the House accept that fishing is a critical industry which faces major problems and that it merits more than one solitary parliamentary debate in a full Session?

Mr. MacGregor: I am very well aware of the importance of the fishing industry to many parts of the United Kingdom and I am also well aware of its importance to certain parts of Scotland. As a former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food who had to deal with such matters, I well recall our debates on the annual review of the common fisheries policy. I will certainly consider whether it is possible to have a second debate on fisheries matters in relation to that review, but I cannot make any promise at this stage.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend and I am sure that he will serve the House extremely well in his new position. During next week, will it be possible to have a review of the planning procedures for public motorways? A bureaucratic process is built into the system. The M3 will go from London to Southampton, but it has taken more than 20 years to get to its present stage and it will probably be another three to four years before it is completed to the borders of Southampton. During the planning procedures, why cannot the numbers of accidents, deaths and injuries be published each month? Some of the protesters would then be aware of the need for improved motorways and it would probably lessen the opposition of those who are in sympathy with delay for delay's sake.

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that it would be right within the terms of our debate on the Queen's Speech next week to include my hon. Friend's point. However, I am sure that, during the course of this Parliament, there will be other opportunities to do so. I will ensure that my hon.

Friend's latter point is drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friends, and I am sure that my hon. Friend will also draw it to their attention.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The Leader of the House will recall my Rape in Marriage (Offence) Bill last Session, and he will also have read this week the Law Commission report which recommended that its provisions should be enacted. Will the right hon. Gentleman have a word this week with the Home Secretary and suggest that its provisions should be included in the Criminal Justice Bill when it comes before the House?

Mr. MacGregor: The Criminal Justice Bill will be published shortly. Clearly, it will not be possible to include these matters within it. We have only just received the Law Commission report and it will need a great deal of reflection. I hope that there will be other opportunities to raise the matter, but I do not think that there will be such opportunities next week.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Berkshire, East): Notwithstanding that we have today a broadly based debate on Europe and defence and that we have had a narrow debate on our recent entry into the exchange rate mechanism, does not my right hon. Friend feel that it is high time that we had a full day's debate on Europe, which would allow us to find out just how many Opposition Members still support their original manifesto commitment to withdraw from the European Community? Such a debate would also help us to find out whether the Leader of the Opposition does or does not believe in a single currency, which was far from clear from his remarks yesterday at the Dispatch Box.

Mr. MacGregor: If we can move swiftly to today's debate, we might find out the answers today.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Would the Leader of the House reconsider his reply to his hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Squire) on the possibility of a debate on the environment? Last weekend saw the conclusion of the world climate conference at which the British Government were once again dragging their heels over the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. This month, the British Government will send a delegation to Santiago for the Antarctic minerals convention and the Antarctic treaty conference. I hope that the delegation will go there to say that it supports the idea of a wilderness part in the Antarctic.

Does the Leader of the House think that those two matters alone merit a special debate in the House on the Government's policy towards world climate and the environment as a whole? If we do not address such matters and take them seriously, we shall all be the losers.

Mr. MacGregor: I should have thought it perfectly obvious that we are taking those matters very seriously. The fact that the Opposition have not chosen to debate them this week shows that—like me—they reject the charges and accusations levelled by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn).

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, if he manages to anticipate the needs of hon. Members, he will earn the gratitude of Back Benchers and probably deserve the praise of his colleagues in government? Will he recognise that, when the various other bodies have considered the satellite television merger, the House will want to return to the issue? It had the chance to debate the takeover of *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* some years ago. Having five national newspapers and the satellite channel in one pair of hands is obviously not desirable.

Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations on having arranged a road casualty reduction debate for Friday? However, could such debates take place between Monday and Thursday in future, so that something can be done about the 450 deaths that occur on the roads each month?

Mr. MacGregor: I have already commented on the first point. As for the second, it is not only a question of a debate on road safety next week; clearly there will be many opportunities to debate road transport and road safety matters in this Session.

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): As the only other Member of the House who is also a member of the Magic Circle, may I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his levitation out of the illusion of control over education and into stage management? Does he feel that he could conjure up a suggestion of good will and arrange a debate on the treatment of the aged and, in particular, the closure of old people's homes? Leicestershire county council is proposing, on 13 November, to approve the closure of two homes in my constituency—de Montfort house and Bewcastle house. Can the right hon. Gentleman give the House a chance to express the feelings of aged people who, having put down roots, are now potentially being turfed out of homes where they have found that they can be happy and enjoy a certain quality of life?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman. I cannot think of a suitable magical allusion to his opening comments, about an illusion, but no doubt one will occur to me later.

I do not think that we shall have an opportunity next week to debate the points that the hon. and learned Gentleman has raised. As he will know, health and social security matters have not been chosen by the Opposition for the Gracious Speech debates.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am sure that my right hon. Friend will do an excellent job with his new responsibilities. May I add my voice to the plea made by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mr. Waller) for a debate on the future of the multi-fibre arrangement under the negotiations currently taking place in the Uruguay round? That sector of industry accounts for 9 per cent. of manufacturing employment in the United Kingdom and many of those people live in the critical and more difficult areas of the United Kingdom.

Mr. MacGregor: As one who had quite a lot to do, in my earlier ministerial capacities, with issues that arose from the GATT Uruguay round, I am very much aware of the importance of that round. I have already said that I will see what I can do to find time for a debate on all the issues arising from it.

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): The Leader of the House may take into account the possibility of a statement or a debate next week—or even earlier—on the role of local authorities in housing provision. Is he aware that very few local authorities are now building houses, and that most are building none at all? Local authorities are in

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a suitable position to assess their own community housing needs, bearing in mind the terrifying deprivation that still exists and the housing requirements that many families are dying for their local authorities to meet.

That being the case—especially in the urban areas and conurbations where there is still decay—would not it be reasonable for the Leader of the House to suggest to his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment that we should have a debate or statement, so that the House can review a new approach to housing provision?

Mr. MacGregor: There will be an opportunity to range quite widely during the first three days' debates next week on various matters.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): Many farmers in Lincolnshire bravely accept the necessity for cuts of 30 per cent. in agricultural support levels in the Community if agreement is to be reached in the current GATT round, but that necessity is a cruel one for many farmers and their families. There is a real crisis of confidence; may I therefore ask my right hon. Friend to find an early stage in this Session when we can debate the grave prospects facing agriculture, so that they can be fully understood by both Parliament and people?

Mr. MacGregor: I am tempted to discuss agricultural matters with my hon. Friend, but this is probably not the right occasion to do so. I am well aware of the implications of some aspects of the GATT Uruguay round for the farming community, but it, too, recognises the importance of achieving a successful outcome to that round. It would be appropriate to raise the sort of points that my hon. Friend wants to discuss if we can find time for a debate on the GATT round.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): A Home Office circular has been issued to electoral registration officers taking the vote away from people who have not completed electoral registers or poll tax registration forms, although these are supposed to be two separate registers. That will lead to a massive decline in the number of people on the franchise, in addition to those who have already been lost due to the impact of the poll tax. May we have an early debate to discuss the state of the Representation of the People Act, which is being undermined by the Home Office circular and the impact of the poll tax in general?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I do not think that it will be possible to have a debate on these matters, but I shall draw to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the remarks made by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the Leader of the House arrange a statement either by the Minister of State, Home Office, who is present, or by the Home Secretary on a matter which is causing increasing concern: the suicides of young persons on remand in prison? Yet another young man has gone to his death because of bullying, which causes grave anxiety not only to those involved in the prison service but to those involved in the law and the Home Office at all levels. Given that Judge Tumin's report in respect of Armley gaol was suppressed for about eight months, the position has become a national disgrace. Will the right hon. Gentleman arrange for someone to come to the House to answer questions on a subject that makes us the shamefaced boys of Europe?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not want to enter into the issues, but my hon. Friend has heard the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I believe that we have Home Office questions next Thursday; I do not know whether it will be appropriate to raise these matters then—that will depend on what questions are asked.

BILLS PRESENTED

Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions)

Mr. Secretary Brooke, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Waddington, Mr. Secretary King and Mr. John Cope presented a Bill to re-enact, with amendments, the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1978, the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1987 and Part VI of the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989; and to make further provision for the preservation of the peace and the maintenance of order in Northern Ireland: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 1.]

Development Board for Rural Wales

Mr. Secretary Hunt, supported by Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Patten, Mr. Secretary Lilley, Sir Wyn Roberts and Mr. Ian Grist presented a Bill to increase the financial limit which applies by virtue of section 12 of the Development of Rural Wales Act 1976 to sums borrowed by the Development Board for Rural Wales, sums paid by the Secretary of State to the Board and sums issued by the Treasury in pursuance of guarantees on loans to the Board: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 2.]

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Secretary Newton, supported by Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Brooke, Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Francis Maude, Mr. Nicholas Scott and Mrs. Gillian Shephard presented a Bill to reduce the amount of statutory sick pay which employers are entitled to recover; to repeal section 9(1A) of the Social Security and Housing Benefits Act 1982; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 3.]

Agriculture and Forestry (Financial Provisions)

Mr. John Gummer, supported by Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Francis Maude, Mr. David Maclean and Mr. David Curry presented a Bill to repeal the statutory provisions relating to the Agriculture Mortgage Corporation and the Scottish Agriculture Securities Corporation; to provide for the recovery of the cost of Government supervision of Community livestock carcase grading at slaughterhouses; to provide for the making of additional grants to persons entitled to Community suckler cow premiums; and to provide for contributions out of the Forestry Fund towards the expenses of the verderers of the New Forest: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 4.]

Oversea Superannuation

Mr. Secretary Hurd, supported by Mrs. Lynda Chalker, Mr. Richard Ryder and Mr. Nicholas Scott presented a Bill to authorise the making of schemes under section 2 of the Overseas Pension Act 1973 for the provision of pensions, allowances and gratuities to or in respect of persons who have contributed to the Overseas Superannuation Scheme, to provide for that Scheme and the regulations under it to have effect as if they together constituted a scheme made under that section; and for purposes connected therewith: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 5.]

Criminal Justice

Mr. Secretary Waddington, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. John MacGregor, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Hunt and Mr. John Patten presented a Bill to make further provision with respect to the treatment of offenders and the position of children and young persons and persons having responsibility for them; to make provision with respect to certain services provided or proposed to be provided for purposes connected with the administration of justice; or the treatment of offenders; to make financial provision with respect to that administration; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 6.]

Armed Forces

Mr. Secretary King, supported by Mr. Secretary Waddington, Mr. Secretary Waldegrave, Mr. Attorney-General and Mr. Archie Hamilton presented a Bill to continue the Army Act 1955, the Air Force Act 1955 and the Naval Discipline Act 1957; to amend those Acts and other enactments relating to the armed forces; to make provision for compensation for miscarriages of justice before courts-martial; to make provision for orders for the assessment and emergency protection of children forming part of or staying with service families abroad; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 7.]

Representation of the People

Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, supported by Mr. Secretary Waddington, Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Brooke, Mr. Norman Lamont, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Ryder, Mr. Francis Maude and Mr. John Maples presented a Bill to make provision with respect to charges for returning officers' services rendered, and expenses incurred, for or in connection with a parliamentary election: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 8.]

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Mr. Speaker: I understand that the first of the statutory instruments—the draft Code of Audit Practice for England and Wales—is not moved.

With the leave of the House, I shall put together the four other Questions on motions relating to the statutory instruments.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

International Monetary Fund

That the draft International Monetary Fund (Increase in Subscription) Order 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Criminal Justice (Northern Ireland)

That the draft Criminal Justice (Confiscation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Planning Applications (Fees)

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Amendment) Regulations 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith pursuant to Standing Order No. 101(3) (Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.).

Planning Applications (Fees) (Scotland)

That the draft Town and Country Planning (Fees for Applications and Deemed Applications) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Question agreed to.

Business of the House

Ordered,

(1) Standing Order No. 13 (Arrangement of public business) shall have effect for this Session with the following modifications, namely:

In paragraph (4) the word 'thirteen' shall be substituted for the word 'ten' in line 43; in paragraph (5) the word 'eighth' shall be substituted for the word 'seventh' in line 45; and in paragraph (8) the word 'two' shall be substituted for the word 'four' in line 66;

(2) Standing Order No. 90 (Second reading committees) shall have effect for this Session with the following modification, namely:

In paragraph (2) the word 'eighth' shall be substituted for the word 'seventh' in line 23;

(3) Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 18th and 25th January, 1st, 8th, 15th and 22nd February, 1st and 22nd March, 12th, 19th and 26th April, 3rd May and 5th July;

Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence over Government business on 30th November, 7th December, 11th January, 8th and 15th March, 10th and 17th May, 14th, 21st and 28th June, and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on 14th and 21st November, 12th December, 20th and 27th February, 24th April, 1st and 15th May, 5th and 12th June;

(5) On Monday 4th February and Monday 22nd April, Private Members' Notices of Motions shall have precedence over Government business until seven o'clock and ballots for these Notices shall be held after Questions on Thursday 17th January and Thursday 28th March; and

(6) No Notice of Motion shall be handed in for any of the days on which Private Members' Notices have precedence under this Order in anticipation of the ballot for that day. —*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [7 November],

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, The Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Younger.]*

Question again proposed.

Foreign Affairs and Defence

4.39 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Douglas Hurd): I hope that the House will forgive me if I leave the Chamber before the end of this debate, as I have an engagement that I cannot escape. Perhaps the House will also forgive me if I do not follow tradition and wander around the world touring the horizon. This debate is starting rather late and I believe that it would be sensible if I concentrated on two main themes—coming events in Europe, and something which is a great source of anxiety to us all, the sombre situation in the Gulf.

Since the House last debated foreign affairs in the debate on the Loyal Address a year ago, we have been through nine months of good news and three months of anxiety. The good news has been the ending of the cold war, the freeing of eastern Europe, German unification in peace and German membership of NATO. All that is familiar to us now, but remarkable and very welcome.

That good news has meant a lot of hard work and it has meant that we all need to take a fresh look at our institutions in Europe to see what changes are needed to suit them for the new world which is now coming into being. In that regard, I want to refer to three institutions that are principally concerned with foreign policy and security in Europe—NATO, the CSCE—the conference on security and co-operation in Europe—and the Community.

It is now clear that NATO will remain and will change. After the successful summit in London in July, the alliance is busily adapting to change in the east, in Germany and in the area of arms control. NATO's openness to change remains one of the secrets of its continued vigour and relevance. NATO's contacts with the Soviet Union and eastern Europe, such as the visit of the Secretary-General Dr. Woerner to Moscow and that being made by the supreme commander next week, are breaking down the old distrust. NATO must adapt its doctrine and force structures to a different strategic environment in which, as the Gulf has shown, the threats that NATO could face are less predictable.

However, a cohesive and collective defence through NATO is essential for Britain and for Europe even though in future a lighter more mobile, more multinational force

structure of the kind which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has already described in this House will make sense. We believe that the vital role of nuclear weapons in ensuring peace will remain, but through the NATO review and future negotiations with the Soviet Union, further major reductions, especially in short-range systems, should be possible.

American conventional and nuclear weapons based in Europe will continue to be indispensable. However, the alliance of the 1990s will need a stronger European pillar to enable Europe to carry out its responsibilities in NATO in defence of common interests. I see the strengthening of the European pillar in NATO as a major priority for 1991. Various options have been sketched by different countries and different organisations, and I do not pretend that any of us has complete answers. I just mentioned that because I am sure that the answer must be found within the framework of the Atlantic alliance. That is something to which we will all have to pay increasing attention—and that includes interested right hon. and hon. Members—during the months ahead.

I want to flag another achievement which, just because it is an achievement and no longer a matter of great controversy, may be forgotten. The conventional forces treaty limiting conventional forces in Europe will be signed in Paris by 22 Heads of Government on 19 November. That is a major breakthrough in east-west arms control. It secures the removal from the European theatre of about 100,000 Soviet heavy weapons and allows us in future to monitor the behaviour of all parties through the exchange of information and by inspections.

In about 10 days' time, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I will go to the CSCE summit in Paris, which will give us an opportunity to consolidate past achievements and re-launch the process which began with the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. We want that summit in Paris to strengthen the basic principles of the Helsinki Final Act and therefore of the CSCE process: democracy and the rule of law through a charter of rights —a magna carta through Europe; prosperity by giving a commitment to the free market and the way in which it is now established that prosperity can best be achieved in Europe and stability through the signing of the CFE agreement to which I have already referred and through setting up a conflict prevention centre and, I hope, by endorsing the British proposal for a voluntary conciliation mechanism in Europe.

The summit will set a new pattern for political consultation among the 34 states taking part. It will establish a timetable for meetings at different levels and it will give the CSCE for the first time a permanent secretariat, although I believe that that should be small. I doubt whether the meeting will be particularly dramatic, because the ground has been well prepared. A great deal of work has been done and we already know the outline of the meeting. However, it is important for the Soviet Union and for eastern Europe.

The former members of the Warsaw pact now accept that NATO will remain, and that that is our wish as NATO members, even though the Warsaw pact may fade away, except perhaps for an occasional grin. Despite that, the Warsaw pact members want to be part of an over-arching organisation in which the United States, the Soviet Union and Canada will take part. They want to build on the foundations of the Helsinki Final Act. That is now agreed and it will take a little time.

It will not all be accomplished in Paris later this month. However, I hope that we will set in hand the building of a new storey and a new dimension in the process which has proved its worth not just in rhetoric—some of us were worried about that at the time—but in practical achievements, not least with regard to human rights.

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): The Foreign Secretary is aware that the Baltic states have applied for observer status at the CSCE summit, and he also knows that historically they are in a quite different situation from the other Soviet republics. Has the Secretary of State considered how he will respond to that?

Mr. Hurd: I am not sure whether that particular proposal will work, because attendance and status at the CSCE summit will be by consensus. Everyone must agree. However, I met the Foreign Minister of Estonia earlier this week and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will meet Mr. Landsbergis before long. I am anxious that we should show the representatives of the Baltic states and the Government of the Soviet Union that we believe that their rights must be discussed and negotiated between the Soviet Union and the Baltic states, and that we take a lively interest in that process. We can all help in building up the contacts that are beginning to form quite successfully between Britain and the peoples of those three states.

I notice that there has been some interest in our policy on the European Community in recent weeks. I want to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on his notable part in the outcome of the seventh meeting of Agriculture Ministers on the GATT round. That agreement was satisfactory for British interests. In business questions, I noticed the concern expressed on behalf of agriculture and textile interests. The agriculture agreement in the Community was satisfactory from our point of view. It was reached because the Commission, this Government and some of the smaller members of the Community held together and managed at the end of the day to outlast the protectionist pressures bearing heavily upon the French and German Governments.

Of course, that is only an offer. It is not the end of negotiation. It enables the European Community to take part in a negotiation which is now reaching a critical phase. Now, when we have an offer, we can point out that the Community is not alone in supporting and protecting its agriculture. The OECD figures show the percentage of farmers' earnings which come from subsidies from the Government to consumers in different parts of the world. In Japan the figure is 72 per cent. That is to say, 72 per cent. of farmers' earnings in Japan come from subsidies from the Government and consumers. In the Community, the figure is 38 per cent. and in the United States it is 27 per cent.

As the world's largest trading entity, the Community has a greater interest than anyone else in a liberal outcome. We simply cannot afford to be protectionist in this or in other matters. The Community exports the equivalent of 23·5 per cent. of our GDP and imports the equivalent of 24 per cent.—much higher figures than in the United States, where the figures are 7 per cent. for exports and 9·5 per cent. for imports. Japan's position is comparable. The European Community has escaped at the last minute from what would have been a very damaging and ludicrous situation. It would have been——

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): It is not finished yet.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): It is only the beginning.

Mr. Hurd: I am talking about the ability of the Community now at least to table an offer. The hon. Gentlemen are quite right: that is not the end of the negotiation; it is the beginning of a critical final stage of the negotiation. It would have been ludicrous if the Community had found itself able to agree almost with nods around a table to far-reaching decisions about the future economic and monetary union and what is called political union, while being unable to agree what was urgent and immediate—the tabling of an offer in the negotiations.

The future of the Community's institutions rests on the successful completion of the single market. That is common ground in the House. Hon. Members stress the importance of that, and that is quite right, not least because it is overwhelmingly in Britain's interests that the Community should do away with internal barriers to trade. The future of the Community's institutions rests also on the two intergovernmental conferences that will start in December.

The first one, in which my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will take the lead, was dealt with yesterday and on numerous previous occasions, and I do not intend to refer to it again today, largely out of mercy to the Opposition. One thing that emerged clearly from our exchanges yesterday was that there was a great deal more light and sweetness on this side of the House than there was on the other side. Our view has been expressed with admirable clarity and coherence.

However, I should like to say something about the second intergovernmental conference, which goes under the imposing but somewhat misleading title of political union. I imagine that that will be the one in which Foreign Ministers will take the lead. In practical terms, it is clear now that the second IGC will consider institutional reforms and how existing institutions of the Community can work more effectively. As with economic and monetary union, at the intergovernmental conference we will have ideas of our own to put forward. I should like to spend a few minutes on that subject.

Our ideas will be based on a number of key principles. We want the present institutional balance in the Community to be maintained. We want to strengthen foreign policy co-ordination among the Twelve. We want the Community to be more efficient and to give better value for money. It spends about £35 billion sterling a year, so that is reason enough to try our best to make sure that it is well spent. We want to make the Community more democratically accountable and accessible to ordinary citizens. We want to make sure that, as the changes occur, they do not make it more difficult for other countries to join which might be qualified to do so in future.

On the matter of balance within the Community, we have to decide what needs to be done at the Community level and ask whether it could be done better at the national level. We do not want the position of member states to be weakened by giving substantial new legislative powers to the European Parliament or, in my view, significantly extending qualified majority voting.

On foreign policy, we have put forward a series of practical ideas for co-operating more closely abroad—that is to say, in our missions abroad—and for improving the co-ordinating machinery in Brussels. I do not see the European Community taking on a defence role, although that is one of the suggestions that has been made. Other ideas in respect of the defence of Europe will be more fruitful. But, as I have already said, I strongly favour ways of strengthening the European defence pillar and making the European defence effort more coherent within the Atlantic alliance.

On the efficiency of Community spending and of Community policies, enforcement is crucial—enforcement of decisions already made. That is of direct interest to a business community, especially in a country such as Britain, where the mechanism for enforcement is relatively strict and effective. Implementation—that is to say the ability and readiness of member states to implement through their national legislatures what is agreed at Community level—is relatively easy to establish. Hon. Members have only to look at the statute book. As the House knows, the Danes and ourselves are well ahead. Enforcement cannot be monitored so accurately without the help of hon. Members, business men and committees drawing any infringements to our attention.

On accountability, we would like to see a more prominent role for the European Parliament, not by giving it more legislative powers but in monitoring Community expenditure. We believe that there is scope for an activity which, in the history of all Parliaments, has proved to be very significant—indeed, key—but which the European Parliament has not yet fully exploited. We would like to see energies and enthusiasms directed towards that matter rather than at always pressing for new legislative powers of which there is an adequate supply at this time.

We also want—this is a matter in which the House rather than the Government should be taking the lead—national Parliaments of the Community working more closely together to monitor and influence the Council of Ministers. I am very glad that representatives of all 12 national Parliaments and of the European Parliament will meet in Rome from 27 to 30 November for the parliamentary conference of the European Community, widely known as the assizes. The British delegation will be led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) as Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee. The assizes—national parliamentarians from all over Europe together with Members of the European Parliament—could be the origin of an important move forward.

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): How are those representatives of the House chosen—by the Whips or by Back-Bench Members?

Mr. Hurd: I do not know. Those who might be intimately concerned with those arcane matters are here, and if they are not, I will make sure that my hon. Friend's pertinent question is referred to them.

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): Will my right hon. Friend give an authoritative comment on the suggestion that has emerged from a small number of our hon. Friends that perhaps Britain's future lies not in the European Community but in joining some extraordinary outer grouping of European countries? Would my right

hon. Friend like to speculate on what that would do to Britain's prestige, influence and general standing in the world?

Mr. Hurd: I am not familiar with that suggestion in any modern form. It used to run about 15 or 20 years ago. Everything that we have said over many years shows our conviction that the Community is the right framework and the right place for Britain to devote its energies. We believe in a European Community which is not stick-in-the-mud or stay-still but which evolves in the light of need towards a liberal and open Europe.

I wish to refer to the point that is often discussed in that context, and that is the enlargement of the Community.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): The Foreign Secretary may recall that yesterday I asked the Prime Minister to respond to a question which I put in the form of applauding the right hon. Gentleman for his statement on Monday at the conference of the Confederation of British Industry, and his view of the possibilities of submerging Parliament, "ogres" and so on, which I thought were entirely supportable. Last week I heard the Prime Minister say that she thought that the European Commission was striving to extinguish democracy. Does that bear any relationship to the right hon. Gentleman's views of the European Commission?

Mr. Hurd: The right hon. Gentleman laid a little trap yesterday into which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did not fall. He must think me very gullible if he thinks that I am going to fall into it. The right hon. Gentleman was kind about my remarks in Glasgow, and that caused me some momentary discomfort until I realised that he was not going to get it right. I am saying that it is a mistake to be frightened by an argument. We do not have a conspiracy—we have an argument. It is perfectly possible to argue, including against the ideas of the President of the Commission, without being defeatist. We have a very good case and it is a fact that the treaty cannot be amended without our consent. Let us therefore get on with the argument and treat it in the vein that my right hon. Friend and I have been trying to do.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: May I turn to the enlargement of the Community——

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose*——

Mr. Hurd: No, I shall not give way. I want to get on.

Four European states are applicants for Community membership and there will no doubt be others. They come in all shapes, and we cannot do other than welcome that diversity. We should not now have new binding commitments that make it impossible for countries to join when they are otherwise qualified politically and ready economically for membership. The door should remain open. The qualifications are quite severe, because they require not only a democratic political system, but also the readiness to accept the Community's requirements about abolition of state aid, and environmental standards. It is therefore not a low threshold—it is a high threshold. It is not possible for the Community to take the line that, because we are so busy among ourselves, it will be impossible as the decade goes on to hold the door shut against qualified applicants for full membership.

Meanwhile, we must help the newly democratic countries of eastern Europe. We are seeking to negotiate association agreements with them. I hope that they will be negotiated in the course of next year. One of Britain's contributions to the development of those democracies is the know-how funds for eastern Europe. They have been a substantial success. There are now 133 know-how fund projects covering Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. We also briefly covered East Germany—until unification—providing 50 scholarships for East Germans to study in this country.

The know-how funds concentrate on four main areas: banking and financial services; privatisation; and advice on employment services, including the development of small businesses, and management training. We are at the forefront of help in the financial sector which, to some extent, those countries—especially Poland—are creating for the first time. The first four companies to be privatised in Poland had the help of know-how fund consultants working on the sale. In Hungary, two Britons are in key positions at the state property agency, and in Czechoslovakia a team of British consultants, financed by the know-how fund, are advising the privatisation agency. In Hungary, a joint British-Hungarian programme is training small business counsellors. In time, the Hungarians will take over the whole project, which will become self-sustaining.

We also provide advice on employment services. Training facilities in Wales are being visited by 10 officials from the federal Czech and Slovak Ministeries of Labour.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware that one anxiety of the developing countries is the high proportion of their—and our—money that is spent on finding accommodation for their people when they come over here. Is my right hon. Friend's Department in touch with the east European communities in this country, which I am sure would be only too glad to provide accommodation and hospitality which would greatly reduce that expense?

Mr. Hurd: That is a practical and helpful suggestion. We shall look into it to see how we can take it up.

The concept of know-how funds has proved itself. It is welcome to our friends in the newly democratic countries. It is highly practical because it gives them quick help in the areas where they most need it when they are creating political and economic democracies. Despite the rigour of the public expenditure round, in the next financial year we shall double our know-how fund assistance to eastern Europe from £15 million to £30 million.

My second main theme is the Gulf. I believe that opinion in this country on the subject is pretty solid and that that owes a good deal to the contributions from the Opposition Front Bench. I am old-fashioned enough to welcome as much national unity as we can achieve at a time of national anxiety.

The international coalition on this subject continues to build peaceful pressures. However, before turning to that, I shall deal first with what is going on in Iraq and Kuwait and express the anxiety of us all not only about our own people there, but about all those, especially Kuwaitis, who are suffering under the aggression. I shall deal first with our own people.

According to our best estimates, 300 British citizens are in Iraqi installations in Iraq, and there are 500 others also

[Mr. Hurd]

in Iraq. We have just over 500 people in hiding in Kuwait and about 60 more Britons are at strategic sites there. I should like the House to consider for a moment those people who have been living in hiding in Kuwait since early August in great and mounting danger and anxiety, who have been helped by Kuwaitis, who are in even greater danger and who have been arrested, tortured and shot. I am not sure that that predicament has properly come through to us all.

It is because of that predicament that we are keeping our ambassador, Michael Weston, and his assistant, Mr. Banks, in the embassy compound in Kuwait for as long as they can reasonably be expected to be there—and they are keen to remain—because they can provide some form of communication and can give some support indirectly—although not as much as they would wish—to the people to whom I have referred.

It is important that the world should understand what is happening in Kuwait. I hope that Amnesty International's report has been read widely both in and outside the House. It gave accounts of the widespread summary executions of men, women and children, carried out in front of their families, and referred to the routine torture of detainees—often of boys as young as 15—rapes, electric shock, and the breaking of limbs. Other eye-witness accounts that have been smuggled out, often at great risk, confirm that behaviour.

In one case, the Kuwaitis sheltering one British citizen were held at gunpoint for 20 minutes while the Iraqis searched their apartment, and looted video and other electronic equipment. In another case, on 15 October, an 18-year-old boy was shot three times, including once in the head, in front of his grandmother and one other family member. The family were forbidden to touch the body until the Iraqi police gave permission five hours later. An ambulance that was called by the Kuwaiti family was turned away by the Iraqis, who insisted that the family should sign a document stating that the boy had been killed by an unknown person. Similar authentic stories from eye witnesses are coming out of Kuwait all the time.

Hon. Members may have seen a letter in *The Independent* yesterday, which was written by a man who signed himself "John Smith". He is one of the Britons in hiding and he confirms that there have been cases of "electrocution, burnings, beatings". He wrote that the people being killed are

"not criminals. By profession they are doctors, scientists, students, teachers, businessmen".

That letter was very firm in spirit. Anyone who read it will have appreciated that.

Against that background, we must consider visits by successive people with the best of intentions to Baghdad to bargain for the release of several dozen hostages here and several dozen there. No one can pretend that it is an easy matter. I imagine that all hon. Members have mixed feelings about it. We can understand the intense relief and happiness of those who are released and their families and the intense disappointment of the greater number who have been left behind. But it is a cruel game of Saddam Hussein. It is repulsive and wrong.

We examined the question of hostages at the Rome summit 10 days ago. We had a discussion first among Foreign Ministers and then among Heads of Government. They were good discussions. Everyone brought to them some experience. We brought to them the experiences of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), who has explained to me that he cannot be here for the debate, but who was good enough to brief me after his mission to Iraq.

After that discussion at the European Council, it was decided by all of us that, in future, Governments would not negotiate the release of hostages and would discourage individuals from negotiating. That conclusion was reaffirmed at the meeting which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the right hon. Member for Wallasey (Mrs. Chalker), attended earlier this week. It is clear in my mind that it would be better if that conclusion were fully respected by everyone.

I have read the speech yesterday of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). I gave him notice—although not long ago—that I would mention him today. He has been in touch with my office this morning. He informed us of his intention to accept an invitation to go to Baghdad for a similar purpose. I ask him to think again. If he goes, he will join in a game in which the aggressor dictates the rules and selected human beings are the pawns.

The British citizen who wrote the letter in *The Independent* and signed his name "John Smith" touched on the matter when he said:

"Every visit by every politician, diplomat or envoy prolongs the agony of those of us under Iraqi occupation."

It is not too late. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will reflect and change his mind. Only one outcome can have any decency in it: the release of all hostages and the ending of the policy of the human shield. The British Government are working with our allies and partners for the release of all hostages, including, of course, those in the Lebanon.

Mrs. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): Before my right hon. Friend leaves the question of the hostages, will he confirm that our attitude to hostages and those who seek to go and help them does not come from an uncaring approach? It is precisely because we care about the hostages, particularly those who have not been able to show themselves, and those who look after them, that we are so anxious about the appalling, tragic game that Saddam Hussein is playing with human lives.

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend has it exactly right. I hope that that point came through in what I have said. I am impressed by the way in which not only Mr. John Smith but all hostages and their families have dealt in public with all the temptations that they have been given by the media to criticise and ask us to weaken our policies. On the whole, in spite of their acute anxiety—which we understand—they have resisted those temptations. That has been a great strength.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Before the Foreign Secretary leaves the question of hostages—I am as opposed as anyone to the holding of hostages—would he say what efforts are being made to give some comfort to the many Bangladeshi people living in camps in either Jordan or Turkey and, indeed, people from Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka who are still in Iraq or Kuwait? What is being done to help the 30,000 Iraqi Kurdish people who fled into Turkey in 1988 from Iraq and are living in the most abominable conditions in camps near the border with Iraq and Turkey? What can be done to help them in their plight?

Mr. Hurd: On the first point, we have given substantial help—my right hon. Friend the Minister of State took a lead in the matter—to airlines, including Bangladeshi airlines, to fly their people who had escaped into Jordan back to Bangladesh. It is much better to help people get home than to help to establish camps in Jordan for the winter.

The plight of the Iraqi Kurds in Turkey is a matter for the Turkish Government. The Community is giving help to Turkey because of the particular burdens which fall on it at this time. However, it is essentially a problem with which the Turks must cope.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Hurd: No, I wish to get on. I have given way several times, and I still have ground to cover.

I wish to make a few remarks about sanctions. The international embargo continues to be broadly effective. The closure of Iraq's export routes and the freezing of its financial assets abroad have drastically reduced Baghdad's access to foreign exchange. The naval, air and land embargoes have cut Iraqi imports to a fraction of their pre-crisis levels. There is no doubt that sanctions are beginning to take effect in Iraq, particularly in the manufacturing and construction centres. Food rationing has also been introduced in an attempt to extend the life of existing stocks.

Shortages are beginning to appear and to build up. They are perhaps building up in areas which are sensitive to Iraq's effort. However, on the evidence that is available now, it would be hard to argue that sanctions alone are likely to be decisive in reversing Iraqi policy in the near future.

I have read almost every week during the past two months that the unique international coalition for the liberation of Kuwait and against aggression is about to fall apart. Even in the most pessimistic and inventive media, no doubts have been expressed about the British part in the coalition. However, there have been all kinds of other ideas. One day the Syrians, and then the Saudis, were having second thoughts. The French were negotiating separately; the Russians had found some compromise formula which was sweeping the board. The President of the United States was faltering in his will. I have read all those things, but none turned out to be true.

Of course there are differences in emphasis. How could it be otherwise when countries come together with different backgrounds, old antagonisms and differences on other matters? That means that there must be continous communication and coming and going. Tomorrow we shall welcome the United States Secretary of State, Mr. Baker, as part of that continuing process. Of course there is an anxiety to avoid war. Everyone shares that. No country is more aware of the sufferings and penalties of war than Britain. But we must go up to the wire in search of peace. There is no dispute about that in Britain.

Some wise words of the Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saudi were reported yesterday. He said:

"We would like a peaceful settlement, but that option is in the hands of the Iraqis."

That is the fact of the matter, and we must not allow it to be blurred by any other activities.

We must face the possibility that the aggressor will resist all the peaceful pressures. That is why it is essential to build up the military option and show that it is not a bluff. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence speaks later this evening, he will elaborate on that point. One fact remains certain: it is not acceptable or safe for the west, the Arab world, or the United Nations to walk away from the problem leaving the aggressor in possession of any part of Kuwait or any compensation for his aggression. It is not acceptable or safe, and it will not happen.

Of course we have our eye on other problems that need to be tackled, in particular the Arab-Israel problem, where the need for peace is as clear as ever. We shall have to return to that dispute as soon as the Gulf crisis is resolved. We do not accept the linkage that Saddam Hussein seeks to draw between the two problems. Indeed, the Palestinians support for Iraq has damaged their cause internationally and especially in Israel. But the PLO continues to have wide support. That cannot be gainsaid and, therefore, the PLO cannot be ignored.

Again we return to a point which is common ground in the House. We require a freely negotiated settlement on the basis of land for peace. That is the only route that we have been able to devise to Israeli security and the satisfaction of Palestinian aspirations, and we shall continue to pursue it.

Everybody seriously interested in foreign affairs knows the dangers of optimism. False dawns are two a penny in the columns of *Hansard* and, though rather less numerous, they also exist in the archives of the Foreign Office. Something happened at the beginning of this year which led even hardened cynics to hope. It was not just the end of the cold war and the freeing of eastern Europe, although that was the main event. It happened in Namibia and South Africa—areas which I have not dealt with today. In Latin America, there has been a great flowering of democracy which has greater signs of permanence about it than before. There have been greater opportunities for us as a result.

In all those areas and even in Cambodia, about which the House is concerned and which we debated only recently, there have been fresh prospects and the hope that rational answers might at last be found to deep-seated, agonising problems. There was a well-founded feeling that hope had a chance. In a world of more than 150 nation states, any hope of a quieter, more solid international order must rest on the principle that aggression by one state against another must be checked and reversed. That is why that must come first in our minds and in this debate.

Whether in the middle east, Europe, South Africa or any other part of the world where Britain can have some influence and be of some help, that help must take the form of support for stability, freer trade and decent Government, because a more open and stable world order is the best defence of British interests.

5.21 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Since our previous foreign affairs debate on the Queen's Speech, the international outlook has been transformed. Following the opening of the Berlin wall, freedom has come to almost the whole of eastern Europe. The ending of the cold war has not only created opportunities for security arrangements to cover the whole of Europe and for increased and accelerated disarmament through negotiation, but has made possible a united approach by the five permanent

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

members of the Security Council to the past year's other notable but grim and baneful development—the invasion by Iraq of Kuwait.

From the moment of that invasion, we in the Labour party took the consistent view that the invasion was unacceptable and must be reversed unconditionally and that all hostages must be released unconditionally. The Foreign Secretary referred to Iraq's conduct within Kuwait. When I was in the Gulf recently, I heard about that from Ministers in the Kuwaiti Government in exile in Taif, members of whose families have endured and suffered greatly. When I stayed in Dhahran it was in a hotel that was otherwise completely occupied by refugees from Kuwait who had gone there after dreadful experiences. We remain completely clear, as we have from the start, that Saddam Hussein cannot be allowed to remain in Kuwait and that United Nations resolutions must be implemented.

We advocated a series of measures aimed at forcing Saddam Hussein out of Kuwait, including economic sanctions, a naval blockade and then an air blockade to enforce those sanctions, and the payment of reparations by Iraq to those who had suffered damage or loss from the invasion. All those steps have become United Nations policy embodied in a series of Security Council resolutions. We support those resolutions and will continue to support United Nations action.

We hope for a peaceful resolution of the crisis through sanctions and believe that those sanctions should be given time to work. I see that Marjatta Rasi, the head of the United Nations committee monitoring sanctions, yesterday said that the embargo was effective and should soon begin to hurt Iraq. At the same time, we have always accepted that the international community might find it necessary to use force to dislodge Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. Throughout we have argued that if force is to be used, it should have the widest possible international support. Therefore, we welcome the report that Mr. James Baker is seeking support in Moscow and elsewhere for a Security Council resolution sanctioning the use of force. We do so not because we are eager for force, but because we believe that if it is to be used, it should have the clearest possible international backing.

In the same way, I welcome what the Foreign Secretary said in his interview on Monday in *The Independent*. The article, which quoted him, stated:

"There is much to be said for 'keeping the maximum support of the international coalition'. So as long as there is confidence that a further resolution will not be put 'at the mercy of a minority who have the capacity to delay', there is an argument for seeking one to reinforce that solidarity."

Those were wise words, which help the House to continue in unity on this matter.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): The right hon. Gentleman said that any military action should have the widest possible support. Can he remind me whether that was the form of words that he used in the two-day debate, or did he say that it should have the support of the United Nations? I cannot remember.

Mr. Kaufman: They are the same. We do not need to start picking and choosing over one word and another. We want to maintain a united attitude in this House and I have used the words that I have used. We are extremely keen that United Nations authority should be available for any action that is taken, if action by force should be taken. During the past three months, we have proceeded parallel to the Government and we hope that that will continue.

As I said willingly, the words of the Foreign Secretary earlier this week were wise and today he has said nothing to diminish that view. In so far as any sense is talked about foreign affairs, it tends to come from him. On domestic policy, he is as bad as the rest of them, but that is a different matter.

Despite the somewhat disorderly events that took place during the Foreign Secretary's visit to Israel, he has put forward sound arguments about the need for a settlement between Israel and her neighbours and for self-determination for the Palestinians, although he could, with advantage, be clearer and more forthright on that aspect. Slowly but perceptibly the right hon. Gentleman is jettisoning his predecessor's shoddy record on Cambodia and moving towards a more acceptable policy on that tormented country. Again, we should like quicker progress and a clearer objective. We should like the Government to combine direct Government-to-Government aid with a total rejection of the Khmer Rouge and its allies.

One issue on which I regret to say that the right hon. Gentleman has made no progress, if he has even [illegible]ed, is South Africa. This year has been notable for another great event—the release of Nelson Mandela—yet next to no progress has been made with the dismantling of apartheid. The right hon. Gentleman will have heard Nelson Mandela insisting that international economic sanctions against South Africa shall be maintained, yet the right hon. Gentleman has been a party to their being diluted unilaterally by the Government at the personal instigation of the Prime Minister. No Conservative Member seeking to ingratiate himself with the Prime Minister even in her absence need quote Mr. Mandela's generous reference to the Prime Minister when he met her recently. As anyone who has met Nelson Mandela knows, he is extraordinarily courteous. When my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and I had lunch with him in Stockholm earlier this year, he spoke in an equally kindly way not only of Mike Gatting but of Arthur Scargill. The Prime Minister is just one of a number to bask in his benevolence.

The Prime Minister's policy on South Africa is in clear violation of both Commonwealth and United Nations policy. She is alone in other international forums as well. I listened with nostalgia to the Foreign Secretary's reference to the Prime Minister's plan for a new Magna Carta. It seems much longer than three months since she launched it with such fanfares in Colorado. It was almost forgotten until yesterday when the press provided us with a report about the latest attitudes towards it. The report said:

"Mrs. Thatcher's plan for a new Magna Carta for Europe received no support at the two-day conference of the 24-member Council of Europe, which ended in Rome yesterday.

Other European ministers believed the plan could undermine the work of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg."

It was nice of the Foreign Secretary to make a token reference to that notion of the Prime Minister's. However, he has more to do with her day by day than most of the rest of us and will know that she has a tendency to launch an idea, play with it a little and then throw it into the corner of the nursery while waiting to find something else to pick up.

The Prime Minister's isolation in other international gatherings is as nothing compared with her antics at NATO and European Community summits. It was interesting to hear the Foreign Secretary's sensible, measured and sober approach to the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. At the summits the Prime Minister had done her damnedest to prevent progress that has been advocated by our partners.

We all recollect the forlorn parade at the Conservative party conference last month of a bevy of right-wing leaders from eastern Europe. They were decent and brave people, too innocent in the ways of democracy to understand how they were being manipulated. One such leader who understood what the Government were up to was Mr. Vaclav Havel, the President of Czechoslovakia. I hear that he wisely resisted the blandishments of the chairman of the Conservative party that he should turn up at Bournemouth. The Conservative party leadership felt that that event was so valuable to them that they repeated it in a live action replay in a recent party political broadcast on television. There they all were, Dr. Antall of Hungary, Mr. Carnogursky of Czechoslovakia, Professor Zawislak of Poland, the Rev. Negrut of Romania and Frau Pohl of East Germany, whom I hasten to reassure the House is not related to the president of the Bundesbank. If the Prime Minister had her way, every one of those people would be targeted with short-range nuclear weapons for which she has such an appetite.

Fortunately, NATO has steadily rejected the Prime Minister's cold war notions and I am glad that the Foreign Secretary reported approvingly on negotiations that will shortly begin to reduce those weapons. However, we remember that when the Prime Minister reported from NATO last year she adamantly said that she was against such negotiations and that nuclear disarmament in Europe had gone far enough. We are glad that progress has been made and that the Foreign Secretary can report it to the House.

It is strange that the Gracious Speech declares that the Government

"will give full support to NATO"

and

"will play a full part in adapting NATO strategy".

NATO has indeed adapted its strategy. In London in July the NATO leaders issued a declaration adopting what they call

"A new NATO strategy making nuclear forces truly weapons of last resort."

The Prime Minister was one of the leaders there and duly signed that declaration, but seven weeks later in Helsinki she said:

"Our first task is to preserve the essentials of the present order. That means . . . continuing to station nuclear weapons in Europe, without putting new constraints on them such as . . . weapons of last resort."

Far from playing her full part in adapting NATO strategy, the Prime Minister has repudiated the new strategy to which she had so recently personally committed herself. The NATO allies must be perplexed if not outraged at the Prime Minister's repudiation of commitments to which they believed that she had in honour signed up. Of course, they do not have the experience of members of the Cabinet. The right hon. Members for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) and the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) as well as Sir Leon Brittan could explain that such things are a regular experience in the Cabinet and are one of the reasons why they have been unable to continue to serve in it under the Prime Minister.

Two years ago from the Dispatch Box I warned the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East that the Prime Minister was determined to have him out of the Cabinet. I remember that he sat scoffing and chortling with the Minister for Overseas Development. Within a year he had been kicked out of the Foreign Office and now he is out of the Government altogether and on the Back Benches. The Foreign Secretary is rightly basking in the golden words which he is garnering and which he has thoroughly earned by the way in which he is conducting himself, but not for a moment should he think that he is any more secure than were all the others who are now on the Back Benches. The Prime Minister disposes of senior Cabinet Ministers as if they were worn-out garments and she never seems to understand why some Ministers resign.

After the resignation of the right hon. Member for Blaby, Mr. Brian Walden asked the Prime Minister why he had gone. She explained:

"I don't know. I don't know . . . I . . . that is not . . . I don't know . . . I have nothing further. I don't know . . . of course I don't know."

Yesterday my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) asked why the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East had resigned. The Prime Minister explained:

"That question should be addressed to my right hon. and learned Friend."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 32.]

Do not blame her, she is only the Prime Minister of a Cabinet whose members gradually seep to the Back Benches.

The Foreign Secretary has nothing to lose by starting a trend in the Cabinet and standing up to the Prime Minister. Despite his attempts to paper over the cracks during the past few days, I recommend that he sort out the Government's European policy because no one else seems capable of doing so. On that issue, as on NATO, the Prime Minister has retreated into a private world of her own, rather like Alice who, told by the March Hare that she should say what she means, replied:

"I do: at least—at least I mean what I say—that's the same thing you know."

It is not the same thing for the Prime Minister.

The Foreign Secretary spoke about the enlargement of the European Community. Eight months ago when speaking about possible East German membership of the European Community in an interview for *The Sunday Times* the Prime Minister said:

"For the Germans to expect East Germany automatically to join the EC would be like taking in Belgium, Denmark and Ireland combined. 'Much worse than that,' the Prime Minister added, 'This would mean taking a state that has been either communist or Nazi since the 1930s.'"

That was her view at the end of February about East Germany joining the Community as part of a united Germany. Six months later in Helsinki the Prime Minister stood that statement on its head. She said:

"The most effective way to overcome divisions between east and west in Europe is to give the east European countries the clear prospect of Community membership."

How can we possibly take her seriously on such issues when within months she totally reverses her position? That is why our partners in the Community now refrain from

[Mr. Kaufman]

bothering to argue with her at Community summits. They know that her most adamantly stated positions will shortly be abandoned and will probably be reversed.

Mr. Ray Whitney (Wycombe): While the right hon. Gentleman is on the subject of reversing positions, would he like to educate the House on some of his party's reversals? For example, this morning in a radio interview the deputy Leader of the Opposition was taking pride in swift reversal. Does the right hon. Gentleman take the same pride?

Mr. Kaufman: The deputy Leader——

Mr. Kinnock: At least we still have one.

Mr. Kaufman: As my right hon. Friend says, we still have a deputy Leader of the Opposition. The great difference between the Opposition and the Government is that we progress, while they regress. They are falling behind on things that they have promised to do, as I shall point out in some considerable detail before I have done.

The positions that the Prime Minister is most likely to reverse are those that she most vehemently adopts. She often contradicts herself, the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor, or all three. So, no one knows what she stands for. Such confusion makes it difficult for anyone to negotiate meaningfully on behalf of Britain. Having examined what the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister say, I have some questions to put to the right hon. Gentleman. I shall be glad to give way as and when he feels able to answer any of them.

First, could he kindly explain the Government's view on environmental policy in the Community? In the Queen's Speech we read that the

"Government will promote further international co-operation on environmental issues."

At the second world climate conference in Geneva on Tuesday, the Prime Minister appeared to endorse that when she said:

"There should not be an excuse for delaying much needed action . . . we must not waste time."

She was referring to dealing with environmental issues. She made specific reference to European Community policy, saying:

"The European Community has also reached a very good agreement to stabilise emissions".

carbon dioxide emissions—

"I hope that Europe's example will help the task of securing world-wide agreement."

One would never guess from those words that the European Community agreement to which she refers was reached last week only by allowing a specific exception for the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom will be allowed to stabilise carbon dioxide emissions five years after the rest of Europe—that totally belies the Prime Minister's urgings in Geneva that we should not waste time and her condemnation of delay. The United Kingdom is to be allowed to stabilise carbon dioxide emissions in 2005 compared with 2000 for the Community as a whole.

The *Financial Times* says that electricity privatisation is one reason why the United Kingdom is lagging behind its partners. I ask the Foreign Secretary to tell us how many more agreements he will be a party to that can be reached only if the United Kingdom is "isolated", to use the *Financial Times'* word, and ignored. Does he support what the Prime Minister says or what she does, because he cannot support both? Her words and her actions are so self-contradictory.

What is the Foreign Secretary's attitude towards majority voting in the ministerial Council? Last week, the Prime Minister said:

"we should be very slow to add any majority competence on the part of the Community."

The Foreign Secretary told the Confederation of British Industry on Tuesday that he merely opposed

"significantly extending qualified majority voting".

He used those words again in his speech this afternoon, so he does not oppose all extensions of majority voting. We should like to know what majority voting he would extend. I think that the House has a right——

Mr. Tony Marlow (Northampton, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: I am asking questions of the Foreign Secretary. At the present rate of change it may well be that the hon. Gentleman will get there soon but at present I am questioning the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Hurd).

What is the Foreign Secretary's attitude to Mr. Delors? The Prime Minister has no time for him at all. At the Conservative party conference last month she spoke of

"socialism through the back Delors".

That was a characteristic example of her wit—fortunately inimitable. On the other hand, the right hon. Gentleman recently described Mr. Delors as "a very able Commissioner". Is he a very able Commissioner despite his wish to foist socialism on this country or because of it? Quoting Shakespeare,

"I pause for a reply".

Mr. Hurd: That is easy. I have to admit that there are some able socialists—misguided, wrong in every respect, intellectually in the dark, but one or two of them have a trace of ability.

Mr. Kaufman: That measured diplomatic response will certainly compensate for a few more insults from the Prime Minister. We must stay with the Commission for a moment because what about the Commission itself? My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition intervened in the Foreign Secretary's speech, mentioning that the Prime Minister told the House last week that the Commission is "striving to extinguish democracy". The Foreign Secretary told the CBI in Glasgow the day before yesterday that

"We have a natural alliance with the Commission".

Is that an alliance to extinguish democracy? Can the Foreign Secretary please explain? He dodged my right hon. Friend's question about whether he agrees with the Prime Minister that the Commission is "striving to extinguish democracy". If he dodges my question, his silence will be taken as dissociation from the Prime Minister.

Mr. Hurd: This is the last of the right hon. Gentleman's rhetorical questions that I propose to answer. Once again, it is an easy one. He is at his old business—I have had to rebuke him about it recently—of selective quotations. The passage that he quoted referred to the single market and there is, and has been for a long time, a convergence of interest between the British and the Commission. On many occasions, we are both allied against the protectionist nature of some other member states.

Mr. Kaufman: I have more questions for the right hon. Gentleman, I can assure him.

The Prime Minister said the Commission is

"striving to extinguish democracy and to put more and more power in its own hands".—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1990; Vol. 178, c.876.]

The Foreign Secretary said that the Government had

"a natural alliance with the Commission".

Is that an alliance to strive "to extinguish democracy" and put more power into its own hands?

Let us move on. There are more matters that the Foreign Secretary can explain—usefully, I hope. Yesterday, the Prime Minister praised the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—the right hon. Gentleman echoed that praise today—for his role in the solution to the row over farming subsidies. The right hon. Gentleman knows full well that the solution was proposed not by the Minister but by the Commission. It was put forward by the same accursed Commission that was denounced by the Prime Minister. This afternoon, the Foreign Secretary said:

"The European Commission and this Government held together."

Is that the same Commission that is striving to extinguish democracy? That is all that I want to know.

The Foreign Secretary today wisely sidestepped the issue of economic and monetary union. Let us ask him about the role of the CBI, as he was at its conference on Tuesday. Yesterday, the Prime Minister quoted the CBI with great approval. She called it

"the people who know how to run industry."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 23.]

On the very day that the Foreign Secretary addressed the CBI in Glasgow, the director-general, Mr. Banham, condemned the Government's European policy saying that ERM entry was

"too late and at an uncomfortably high level."

Does the Foreign Secretary agree with the CBI, which the Prime Minister praises so highly?

Another matter that the Foreign Secretary has dealt with recently is Switzerland and European economic policy. The Prime Minister last week praised Switzerland for its marvellous record on currency and she applauded it for staying outside EMU. However, the Foreign Secretary must be aware that the Swiss franc shadows the deutschmark, so it is effectively part of the exchange rate mechanism. He pointed out on Sunday that

"Switzerland is now becoming very interested in joining the Community."

How does a communautaire Switzerland fit in with the Prime Minister's statement that Switzerland prospers by being completely independent of the Community?

What about the ecu? The Prime Minister told the House last week that the hard ecu would not become widely used throughout the Community and that possibly it would be most widely used for commercial transactions. Does the Foreign Secretary recall that when the Chancellor of the Exchequer launched the hard ecu in June he envisaged that

"ecu-bank notes could provide a natural currency for tourists and business travellers. The idea could catch the popular imagination; and as notes came to be used more frequently it could help the development of large-scale markets in ecu deposits."

Does the Foreign Secretary agree with the Prime Minister that the hard ecu will not become widely used or with the Chancellor of the Exchequer that the hard ecu will catch the popular imagination?

One reason for the Prime Minister's opposition to the single currency is, she said yesterday, that it would be administered by an unelected body. However, an integral part of the Government's hard ecu policy that the Foreign Secretary has consistently praised is that the hard ecu would be administered by the European monetary fund. When the Chancellor of the Exchequer launched the hard ecu he said that the European monetary fund would issue ecu deposits or notes in exchange for national currencies and would set interest rates on the hard ecu. He said:

"Let me explain why I have no qualms about such an institutional development. We are not opposed to new institutions where there are new jobs that genuinely need to be done. That is certainly the case here. Not only would we be looking at the job of managing the ecu; there are other important roles that such an institution might usefully take on. They might include the tasks involved in managing the exchange rate mechanism and its financing facilities, including the functions of the central bank governors committee and the existing European monetary co-operation fund in that area."

That would be a powerful body. Would it be an elected, democratically accountable body, or would it be appointed and, as the Prime Minister puts it, undemocratic? If the latter is the case, why are the Government proposing the setting up of such a monstrously undemocratic organisation with such wide powers over the monetary and economic policies of domestic Governments, especially as the Foreign Secretary, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and even the Prime Minister, on her good days, see the hard ecu evolving into a single currency?

On the question of the single currency, the Prime Minister scoffed yesterday at my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. She alleged that his view was "that the issue can be solved by having the Queen's head on an ecu whose value is determined elsewhere."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 30.]

The hard ecu, which may evolve into a single currency, would certainly have its value determined elsewhere, not here. Would it have the Queen's head on it, or would it not? Could the Foreign Secretary enlighten us? Will he also say what he thinks of the remarks at the weekend of Sir Leon Brittan who, of the single currency, said this:

"it is possible to have a single currency . . . but to have the pounds and the coins with the Queen's head on one side and their value denominated in pounds—but with the ecu equivalent on the other side. . . . It has been agreed that this would be possible."

I should be interested to know whether the Foreign Secretary endorses Sir Leon Brittan's statement.

Mrs. Currie: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kaufman: No. The hon. Lady has left the Government. She may return at some stage, but it is the Foreign Secretary to whom I am putting the question.

Mrs. Currie *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order.

Mr. Kaufman: Above all, can the Foreign Secretary say what he thinks of economic and monetary union? The Prime Minister said last week that:

"What is being proposed now—economic and monetary union—is the back door to a federal Europe".—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 877.]

The Foreign Secretary was present at the Dublin meeting in June. He will remember the Council's conclusions at the Dublin summit. It said:

"The European Council decided that the Intergovernmental conference will open on December 13th

[Mr. Kaufman]

1990 with a view to establishing the final stages of Economic and Monetary union in the perspective of the completion of the Internal Market and in the context of economic and social cohesion. The Conference should conclude its work rapidly with the objective of ratification of the results by Member States before the end of 1992."

Ratification is to be not in 1994 or 2000 but before the end of 1992.

If economic and monetary union is the back door, as the Prime Minister says, to a federal Europe, why did not the Prime Minister repudiate those conclusions when she made her statement to the House on 28 June, only four months ago? The Foreign Secretary referred to taking remarks out of context. He can study the context of everything that the Prime Minister said that day, from one end to the other, and he will see that far from repudiating the Dublin Council conclusions, the Prime Minister said that the United Kingdom had signed up to economic and monetary union when we entered the Community in 1973.

This country's interests are being gravely damaged by the Prime Minister's and this Government's continual isolation in international organisations. A Labour Government will play an active and constructive role in both NATO and the European Community. In NATO we shall work with our partners in furthering the conventional forces in Europe process and in arguing for the complete elimination by negotiation, by both the Warsaw pact and NATO, of all land-based short-range nuclear weapons in Europe. NATO is working towards that third zero. As the Foreign Secretary pointed out, negotiations on such weapons are shortly to begin. A Labour Government will co-operate with our NATO partners in achieving a successful outcome.

A Labour Government will seek to persuade our NATO partners to move logically from the present nuclear weapons of last resort policy towards a nuclear no first use policy. NATO has gone well on the way to that process. We believe that the process should be completed. With those two further logical extensions of current NATO policy, the flexible response policy will fall into obsolescence. NATO should play its important role as an organisation not only for security but for negotiation, implementation and verification of arms control and disarmament agreements.

In the European Community a Labour Government will seek to safeguard and extend Britain's interests, not by isolation and offensive attitudes but by constructive partnership. In the political intergovernmental conference a Labour Government would argue for the extension of qualified majority voting to those decisions where it would help to improve social policy and raise environmental standards.

We believe—we argue—that the European Parliament should be able to initiate proposals for legislation, which would be considered by the Commission and the Council of Ministers, as well as to comment on their proposals. We believe that the Parliament should have the right of second reading on the ministerial Council's social and environmental policies.

As for economic union, a Labour Government will argue for any system of a central bank to be politically and democratically accountable and that a strong regional policy, a strong environmental policy, a growth strategy and the social charter are essential if the establishment of a central bank is to be considered. The policies on political union were endorsed by overwhelming majorities at the Labour party conference last month. We shall seek allies and partners for our point of view, a point of view that is more likely to be accepted from Ministers who do not attend meetings only to disrupt them and insult fellow participants.

The future of NATO and the future of the Community are not graven in stone. They are there to be shaped for Britain's benefit. On too many issues vital to our future this Government either have nothing to say or else too much to say. They have left Britain too weak to go into European institutions and too weak to stay out. A Labour Government will work internationally for our national interests in a way that this played-out Government no longer can. The sooner the country gets the chance to make the change, the better for Britain and all our people.

5.59 pm

Mr. Richard Luce (Shoreham): Clearly the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) enjoyed indulging in his fantasies about the Government's approach to the European Community. That is a veil to hide the total lack of a cohesive Labour party policy to the European Community and the remarkable divisions within the Labour party on that issue. That having been said, on this occasion I can forgive the right hon. Gentleman for much of his invective because on the Gulf he showed consistent support on behalf of the majority of the Labour party for our policy.

I paid a visit to the Gulf recently. I went to the Gulf states of Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. I left without any fanfare and in my usual modesty. I issued no statement to the chairman of my association and when I returned I was disappointed that there was no speculation about whether I was bidding for the leadership. If ever there was a case for keeping our nerve on this issue and remaining consistent in our policy, this is it. The threat that we faced in early August has changed in no way and, therefore, the United Nations resolutions that Iraq should withdraw from Kuwait and that the legitimate Kuwaiti Government should be restored remain as valid and important. Failure to implement those resolutions would lead only to disaster in the middle east and, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, the undermining of international order. Incidentally, I thought that my right hon. Friend's speech was outstanding in the leadership it showed and in his sense of humanity.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said, it is right that no stone should be left unturned in trying to persuade Saddam Hussein to withdraw of his own accord. Like one or two of my colleagues, I have been through a similar experience—in my case the Falklands—and the signals must be clear. There must be no misunderstanding on the part of Saddam Hussein that we mean business. So often conflict arises through misunderstanding of each other's objectives and through underestimating what we mean to do. The message must be determined and united among all United Nations members. It must be clear that we seek the withdrawal of Iraq. There is a Ciceronian maxim—my Latin is rusty so I shall quote it in English—which says, "If you want peace, prepare for war". There is a great deal of truth in that. My right hon. Friend talked about the preparation by Britain, the United States and

the 25 other countries to put across a clear message that if Iraq does not withdraw peacefully, other means will have to be used. If that determined message can be got across, the chance for peaceful accord will be stronger.

However much of a hornets' nest of danger the middle east may be, we have to keep our sights on that single message. As is so often the case, out of bad news must come good. If the objective is achieved—as it will be—we have an opportunity to mobilise the forces of moderation in the middle east to defeat the forces of extremism and violence. The precondition for that must be the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait.

During my visit I found that there was a positive attitude by many leaders of the Gulf states to how they might develop regional security in the area. Many of the views were positive and sensible. On military issues there was a great deal of discussion within the Gulf Co-operation Council and by other means to see stronger unity among the forces and a unified command. There was also a positive attitude towards the wider issue of the prohibition of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and the need for restraint on conventional weapons. Lessons can be learnt about that from our European experience. Many of the leaders in the moderate Arab world are talking about it now. There was a positive attitude to how we can mobilise the Saudi Arabians, Egyptians and Syrians as moderate forces to try to contribute to stability.

Many of the Gulf states have long been concerned about the threat to their stability from neighbouring powers, particularly Iraq. We are seeing the emergence of the new states. They are economically impressive, they have highly developed trading centres such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi and they are beginning to discuss how they can strengthen the rapport between the traditional rulers and the people. Wealth is being shared much more widely and there is a growing recognition that they need to strengthen the degree of accessibility of the traditional rulers and their accountability to their people. There is much sensible discussion about that.

Equally, we should not turn our backs on any invitations or requests that come to this country or the British Government to help those states develop their stability in the region. We have a long history of association with the Gulf states going back to the last century. There is a great deal of good will towards us and Britain still has a special role to play in that part of the world.

Provided that we remain firm—the unity of the House is essential in this process—after the withdrawal of Iraq new opportunities will exist to develop statesmanship in the middle east and Britain and my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary can play a leading part in that.

I have just returned from an Anglo-Polish round table conference. It is clear to me that if we want to learn the lessons of the 1930s and see stability in central Europe —central Europe, particularly Poland and Czechoslovakia, provided the spark for the world war in 1939—we must welcome with open arms the central European nations to the European Community. If they wish to be full members, we should welcome that prospect and make that clear to them. I was glad that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary talked about that and made the position clear.

Poland in particular is a prisoner of its history, of occupation by neighbouring powers and constant partition. Today, on one side it has a disintegrating Soviet Union and on the other a strong, united Germany. It welcomes German unity but sees its economic strength as a little worrying. Poland wishes to counterbalance that by strong relations with Britain and France and by joining the European Community. It is in Britain's interest to see that happen. We need a new framework in that area in which Poland, Czechoslavakia and Hungary can develop strong democracies, market economies and a secure future. Apart from developing our bilateral interests with them, the best way to see that happen must be to welcome them into the Community. Initially, as we now have, there should be special arrangements with the Community, then association and, over a suitable length of time, full accession. I should like to stress to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary that at the same time as the central European countries are expressing an interest in joining the Community and full accession, other countries such as Switzerland, Austria and the Scandinavian countries are also showing an interest. We cannot allow the central European countries to join without allowing those other countries to join if they so wish.

We have not begun to think through the implications of that for the long-term development of the European Community. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that no binding commitment should be made within the European Community that makes the accession of other countries such as the central European states more difficult to achieve. That was an extremely important point to make.

Britain's role within the Community is of brick building, while others seek to provide roofs when walls have not been built. Britain is better at providing the bricks —the practical construction of a European Community —and can take a positive lead. We must discuss what it will mean for the Community when those other countries join in due course. I am convinced that there is a role for Britain, and that in seeing that the central European countries join the European Community we shall be strengthening stability in that part of Europe.

6.10 pm

Mr. Denis Healey (Leeds, East): I was tempted to follow the Foreign Secretary in what he said about NATO and the Community, but much of what I would have wished to say was said in a brilliant speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), and some of the points were made by the right hon. Member for Shoreham (Mr. Luce). I shall follow the right hon. Gentleman and the Foreign Secretary in speaking a little on the Gulf.

Perhaps it is not inapposite to say that when I was Defence Secretary and involved very much in Gulf affairs, the father of the right hon. Member for Shoreham was the resident in the Gulf. He was one of the last of Britain's great proconsuls, whose wisdom, experience and sensitivity to the march of events was of inestimable value at that time. When the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) visited the Gulf with the present Foreign Secretary, the thinking of such people taught him that the idea that Britain should go back was simply not on.

[Mr. Denis Healey]

I heard from the right hon. Gentleman's father that Kuwait was not prepared to allow us to keep troops there, although we had a treaty for defending Kuwait and the frontier was only a 20-minute drive from the city. We had to keep our troops hundreds of miles away in Bahrain, and the Kuwaiti Government were financing the Free Bahraini Movement, which was trying to get us out of Bahrain as well. Such an experience, which is well known to anyone who has served in the Gulf, should be borne in mind when we consider the attitudes of some Arab Governments to current events.

The debate in September, like the speeches that we have heard so far today, emphasised that the Government have almost the total support of hon. Members for their decision to support the blockade established by the resolution of the Security Council. It has been made clear today, as it was in September, that that is not a blank cheque for future action. It is the possibility and the conditions for the use of force to expel Saddam Hussein to which I want to address my remarks.

It was noticeable in the last debate that hon. Members who had personal experience of war warned how unpredictable war can be. One never knows at the beginning of a war quite how it will end up; weapons on which one is content to rely might not work as effectively in fighting as they work on test ranges. The problems of a war against Iraq are now accepted by almost anyone who reads the newspapers. If we ever have to resort to force, and if we hope to be successful, the plain fact is that the difficulties and dangers of an operation to expel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait by force must not be underestimated.

General Schwarzkopf, the commander-in-chief, and indeed the commander of British troops if they are used in the Gulf, said that the military problems mean that a war could be as prolonged and bloody as in Vietnam, and for much the same reason. The west is always at a disadvantage fighting an Asian enemy on his own territory, particularly an enemy who attaches less value to human life than our western democracies are liable to do. That was the fatal error made by the French, and later by the Americans, in Vietnam.

There is remarkable agreement on that among Americans who have some experience. Senator Sam Nunn, who is chairman of the Armed Forces Committee of the Senate, and General Schwarzkopf have insisted in recent weeks that the west and its allies in the Gulf must give all other options a chance to work before resorting to the final arbitrament of war.

There has been a notable movement on the political side in the past few weeks. President Bush has wisely decided that, whether or not it is legally possible to rely on article 51 as a justification for the use of force against Iraq, it is politically wise to seek the authority of the United Nations through a specific resolution in the Security Council that endorses military action under agreed conditions. As I understand it, that is the main purpose of Secretary Baker's current tour of the middle east and allied countries. No doubt it will be the main subject of his discussions in London tomorrow.

That does not mean, to answer a question put by a Conservative Back Bencher with whom I had a charming exchange in the last debate, that under no circumstances should Britain act except with total support of a United Nations resolution. It is perfectly conceivable that a resolution might be vetoed by a country that has no direct stake or role in the Gulf or be opposed by tiny countries that oppose the blockade under the existing resolution.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton and, as I understood it, the Foreign Secretary said, it is essential that the alliance that has produced the consensus for the blockade should be maintained if military action is to follow. It is already clear that it will be very difficult, but not necessarily impossible, to maintain the consensus that has made the blockade so successful so far. There are clear misgivings in Moscow about the use of force, and all the hopes that the Foreign Secretary rightly expressed that the Gulf crisis might be the nettle from which we pluck the safety of an enlarged role for the United Nations in creating a new world order would be fatally damaged if the Soviet Union were unable or unwilling to agree to military action.

There are grave misgivings in Japan. I spoke to some of the Japanese leaders earlier this week, and, as the Foreign Secretary will know, it now seems almost certainly that Prime Minister Kaifu will not get the consent of his Parliament to send even non-combatant military personnel to take part in the operation. There are grave misgivings in Germany, reflected in the fact that the German Government, which I believe proposed the motion in Rome that Governments should not support private initiatives, have decided to support the Brandt initiative. There are great misgivings in France, and some of the recent actions of the French Government and some of the remarks made by French leaders have shown how deep those misgivings are.

Most important in some ways is the reaction of the Arab Governments who are supporting the blockade. After Mr. Baker's visit to Cairo a few days ago, the Egyptian Government refused to answer the question whether, if there were resort to war, the Egyptian troops in Saudi Arabia would take part in the operation. The Syrian Government have already expressed deep misgivings about resorting to war and seem to be engaged in a diplomatic campaign against their potential American and British allies in the operation.

Incidentally, there is a tiny point that I should like to put to the Foreign Secretary. Perhaps he will spring to his feet to answer my question. Is it really wise not to give diplomatic recognition to Syria, which is part of the alliance that we are seeking to maintain against Iraq, but at the same time to give diplomatic recognition to Iran, which is little more than neutral in this operation? Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman can explain this apparent contradiction in the British Government's attitude, or perhaps the reason is one that should never be mentioned in the House.

Mr. Hurd: The reason we broke off relations with Syria some time ago was connected with the Hindawi affair and the evidence that Syria was involved in state terrorism. There is a problem, and one that we would like to see overcome. It has not yet been overcome. There is an obstacle, and it takes two to remove an obstacle.

Mr. Healey: I sincerely hope that the right hon. Gentleman is successful in overcoming the obstacle—I take it that he means the obstacle in No. 10 Downing street.

Even Saudi Arabia is divided on the issue. The Saudi Government have so far refused to say whether they would participate in an operation, although they have said that an operation should not take place from Saudi soil without their agreement. When an official was asked if that meant that the Saudi Government agreed that they would participate, he did not answer.

The command and control muddle reflects that. In fact, a large area of territory along the frontier between Saudi Arabia and Kuwait is, I understand, currently manned entirely by Saudi troops and troops from other Muslim states—Arab states and Pakistan—yet it is unclear how the British and American forces in Saudia Arabia which are behind them will be able to operate if those troops are not participating. I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence will be in a position to clear up part of the muddle that remains as to how the non-western forces already in Saudi Arabia will operate, under whose command they will be and, indeed, whether they will operate at all.

So far as I can make out, Kuwait is the only Arab country—now represented abroad by the royal family, which fled on the day of the invasion—unequivocally to support military action against Iraq. Indeed, it thinks that such action is long overdue. However, the size of the forces on both sides shows that little of Kuwait will still be standing after such an operation. It will be extremely difficult, although it may well be necessary, to maintain an adequate consensus among the countries which are wholeheartedly supporting the blockade if Washington and London wish to resort to force; yet if force is used essentially bilaterally by British and American forces, the consequence will be a total disaster, as it is bound to make the situation worse than it is today.

One need only reflect on the enormous problems that the Saudi Government and the other Gulf Governments are facing with their own Muslim populations to see the problems that will result if a combination of Christians, Jews and women are engaged in an attempt to destroy a neighbouring Arab state. We may have no sympathy for this attitude, but we ignore the reality of it at our peril.

Even a successful invasion could leave the situation worse than it is today, but not necessarily worse than if we had not undertaken it. Syria and Iran would dominate the middle east once Iraq was no longer a factor. It is only a couple of years since the west was supporting Iraq to prevent Iran from dominating the middle east. There is no guarantee that, if Saddam Hussein falls, the successor will be any more tolerable. Indeed, there is a good deal of evidence that it may be somebody even less tolerable.

I think that we would be wise to heed the words of the right hon. Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), who spoke yesterday: we know from the last world war that it is easy for a war to end with all its initial objectives overthrown. Therefore, it is not entirely wise for western leaders to keep sounding off and shouting wolf about the possible use of force.

There is little doubt that President Bush made those belligerent speeches in the past few weeks because he was running into the mid-term elections and his popularity had collapsed over his handling of the budget. I am bound to say that the various statements that he made recently on the Gulf affair have been as confused and self-contradictory as the statements that he made on the budget. Even on the purpose of the American operation, he started by saying that it was to protect a vital economic resource: oil; then he said that it was to save the world from aggression; and then he said that it was to protect western values, illustrated in the Saudi area by the fact that, even since the war began, some three score men have had their hands chopped off for theft and it is still possible to stone women to death if they are thought to be guilty of some sexual irregularity.

The fact is that American opinion is already deeply divided on the wisdom of going to war. A large minority of Democratic members of the House of Representatives have insisted that President Bush should not go to war without a resolution of Congress to that effect. I believe that, if we went to war without the widest possible international support, British opinion would be as deeply divided as it was during the Suez campaign.

The lesson which I would draw from all this is that it is wise to talk softly if one carries a big stick. We must concentrate on the practical problems of building up the forces needed to do the job fairly quickly. The inability of the British as well as the Americans to get their tanks out to the Gulf in the time originally hoped is a grave warning of some of the deficiencies in current western military planning. What I most deplore is a suggestion, which was present a little even in the Foreign Secretary's speech, that there is no evidence that sanctions can work. I mentioned the Suez affair, which so deeply divided opinion in Britain not so long ago. Sanctions there were totally effective. Within a week President Eisenhower threatening to cease giving financial help to Britain, France and Israel, those countries withdrew from the territory that they had occupied by aggression earlier in 1956. That was a totally effective use of sanctions. I dare say that Saddam Hussein is a tougher nut than the Tory Prime Minister of Britain at that time, but he cannot be totally immune to the consequences even of economic sanctions.

The most striking point about sanctions now is that they have not only robbed Iraq of what it hoped to gain from occupying Kuwait—the oil produced in Kuwait—but they have made it impossible for Iraq even to sell the oil that it produces on its own territory. Iraq derives 90 per cent. of its hard currency from oil, 90 per cent. of which is carried through the two pipelines through Turkey and through Saudi Arabia. The rest has been successfully interdicted by the naval blockade in the Gulf.

There is a good deal of evidence that the Iraqis are running into deep trouble over oil. They can no longer produce the oil, because there is nowhere to stockpile it, and they have stockpiled everything they can within their existing resources. It is impossible for them to obtain the chemical additives needed to convert the oil out of the ground into fuel suitable for their tanks and their aircraft. That was probably why they tried to introduce domestic oil rationing a few weeks ago. The reason why they dropped the rationing a little later was that they saw that the west realised that that was the reason.

Mr. James Schlesinger, who was Secretary for Energy as well as Secretary of Defence in the United States, said at a meeting that I attended in London a few weeks ago that the United States was also having some difficulty in amassing the necessary stockpiles of fuel for its tanks and its aircraft in Saudi Arabia. Saddam Hussein has already been severely punished for his action and has derived no gain from it except for the temporary addition of a number of television sets and video recorders that were looted from Kuwait city.

The cumulative effect of economic sanctions will produce a change in Iraqi policy, although, as I warned the

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House in the previous debate, it will take months to achieve. However, as Mr. McGeorge Bundy, who was President Kennedy's security adviser, pointed out the other day, a year of sanctions is far cheaper and far more likely to be effective than even one week of war. It may be the middle of next year before Saddam Hussein finally cracks, but the west—or some western Governments—have been very unwise to give him additional disincentives to withdrawing from Kuwait by saying that, if he withdraws, he will be prosecuted as a war criminal and that we shall have a series of Nuremberg trials. If it was desired to encourage him to stay, adding such a condition is the most likely to be successful.

Even the question of what follows a withdrawal should not be pre-empted too rapidly. Only last week, during Mr. Baker's visit to them in Taif, the Kuwaiti Government said that they would be prepared to negotiate about the islands and about the oilfields once the Iraqis had withdrawn. We now know, thanks to the American ambassador in Baghdad and to her attempt to explain the embarrassing compte rendre of her conversation with Saddam Hussein two days before Saddam attacked, that the Americans thought that Saddam Hussein was going to take only the oilfields and the islands, and that is why she did not react to his warning that, if he did not get what he wanted by negotiation, he would get it by force.

In such a situation, the job of diplomacy is to solve disputes without war. The back-up of force is sometimes necessary to make negotiation successful. However, I very much hope that the Prime Minister will let the Foreign Secretary get on with the job of negotiation, which is his job as Foreign Secretary. I noticed that, when Mr. Gorbachev was given the Nobel peace prize the other day, Mr. Gerasimov, whom I quoted to the delectation of the House in the previous debate, said, "Do remember, gentlemen"—he was talking to the world's press—"that he is not getting the Nobel prize for economics."

I do not think that our Prime Minister will ever get the Nobel prize for diplomacy, although I doubt whether Mr. Bernard Ingham would ever show the same independence of spirit as to make a similar remark to the press. In that respect, at least, he falls far short of the standard set by Mr. Gerasimov.

While the military build-up proceeds—and it will probably take until at least the end of the year before all the American troops are in place—it is important to clear up the dangerous ambiguities about the command structure, to which I have referred. It is even more important to clear up some of the ambiguities about the aims of negotiation after Saddam Hussein has withdrawn. It is necessary to discuss the Palestine problem, arms control and disarmament in the middle east because a clear western position supporting the right of the Palestinians to a state of their own and supporting the control of armaments in the area would enormously strengthen support for military action if it ever had to be taken.

One of my conclusions from the events of the past four weeks is that, if the Anglo-Saxons are unwise enough to go to war without at least 90 per cent. of the support that they have had for the blockade, and if the disaster that I fear follows, they will not be able to claim that they did not know that the gun was loaded.

6.36 pm

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): Before I debate with the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), I should congratulate my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on what, by anybody's count, was an outstanding speech. The House and the country should be grateful for his role in these difficult months.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East was correct to ensure that we do not underestimate the terrifying dangers of war. I have suffered from some of them. However, I am worried that some people will interpret considerable parts of his speech as a presentation of appeasement. I do not believe that his speech was intended to be that, but I fear that the Iraqis will publish it as such and will use it to their benefit. The speech would appear to show a division in the —so far—unified approach in the House.

There can be few more commanding yet sombre and challenging tasks for a Member of Parliament than to have to consider and decide what action his country must take and what part Britain must play to overcome the use of armed aggression by another nation. That task becomes bleak and abhorrent when all the indicators point to the need to go to battle—not a political battle and not a battle of argument, but the ultimate battle of men and weapons taking part in war. I am afraid that that is the dark and sombre message which must be the warning from the House tonight. The warning must go to Saddam Hussein and to his murdering clique in Iraq, not only from the Government but from the Back Benches, and the warning must be clear and unequivocal. If, after all the efforts of diplomacy and sanctions, the Iraqis do not withdraw from Kuwait—and they must not only withdraw, but put aside the chemical and nuclear weapons that they possess—Britain will not flinch from playing its part, backed by the United Nations, to force withdrawal from Kuwait.

May I begin my analysis with a certain amount of criticism of the United Nations and western approach? If force is necessary to bring compliance with United Nations resolutions, it must be made clear that war has already been declared. War has been forced on Kuwait, where Iraqi armies have fought Kuwaiti troops and defeated them in battle; where Kuwait's Ministers have been murdered for Iraq to take power; and where Kuwait has been plundered, raped and put under military rule. War exists today. It is not we who will initiate it; it has been started already. Perhaps we are existing in a time equivalent to the days of late 1939 and the early 1940s —the quiet before the storm.

I support absolutely the view expressed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. If Saddam Hussein actually withdraws—having pledged that he will not—if he restores the Kuwaiti rulers whom he has termed traitors to Islam, and if he returns the gold that he has stolen from the Kuwaiti treasury, what then will be the position? Remaining in power is a man who seeks to become the leader of the Arab world; a man who will use every opportunity to wreak revenge on America and the western nations; a man who has shown blatant disregard for the most basic civilised standards of international law by forcing men into servitude, and into being his hostages, to provide himself with a human shield.

Does the House really believe that this man—with a known arsenal of chemical weapons, and likely to possess an atomic weapon within a year and a half—will sit quietly and attempt to stabilise and bring peace to the middle east?

That cannot be achieved until another regime governs Iraq —we may not know what that regime will be, but it must be a different one—and action has been accepted to control and obliterate the chemical and atomic threat. That is not a simple matter, but it is one from which we must not shrink if, as we hope will happen as a result of a Palestinian settlement, permanent peace is to be restored to the middle east.

My next point can be summed up in two words: "Whither NATO?". I was delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence turned his mind to this problem. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation has probably been the most successful military alliance ever formed. For more than 46 years, 16 nations have pooled part of their military resources to ensure the defence of the west. With the massive deterrent of the nuclear weapon, NATO has ensured peace in Europe for a period that is a record in modern times. Now, however, with the threat of communism and communist expansion, if not terminated, massively diminished and with the probable signing of a conventional forces reduction treaty later this month, we are faced with entirely new requirements.

Already a massive clamour for extensive and dramatic savings on defence expenditure can be heard throughout all the alliances. But are we to let NATO just slip away? To that I answer a trenchant no. What is frequently forgotten is that NATO is not just a military alliance, but the meeting of the minds of political leaders and Ministers in Europe, and from across the Atlantic and Canada. It is not just the military high command—now in Brussels—but the committee of Ministers; sometimes Heads of State, sometimes defence Ministers or Ministers of foreign affairs. In addition, there is the North Atlantic Assembly, which is made up of politicians from every one of the 16 member nations. That is the only body officially recognised by all Governments in the treaty organisation in which American senators and congress men regularly meet European politicians to discuss major problems facing us all—not just military problems, but matters of politics, economics, science and technology, and even civilian affairs. That does not happen in the European Community, the Western European Union or the Council of Europe: America is just not there. It is therefore unique, and I believe that it has provided a basis for ensuring that an ever-growing number of American congress men have come to meet European politicians with whom they would never normally come into contact, and have come to understand what Europe is all about.

I believe that, as the military necessity of the alliance in Europe evaporates, political accord becomes even more important. How do we achieve that for the future? If anyone believes that after Iraq the world will turn into a place where there will be no international disputes—where no nation will ever think of trying to settle problems by the use of force, and where we shall step into communal peace —I think that that person can be compared with the Mad Hatter, living in Wonderland.

I believe that we need to ensure that there exists, or is provided, a deterrent—a major impediment strong enough to deter any nation from again contemplating the use of force. That deterrent should make it obvious to any potentially aggressive nation that aggression on its part cannot and will not be allowed to succeed. That can no longer be a nuclear threat, for no nuclear weapons will be used in a "Bush war", or in the type of instance to which I referred. What could and should be created is a military and political treaty between the existing NATO nations extended to take in Japan—I know that that will require a change in the constitution of the peace treaty, but even now Japan has observer status in relation to the North Atlantic Assembly—and Australia.

That would turn the treaty of the North Atlantic into a global treaty, which before long—or perhaps even at its inception—would allow Russia to become a member. Like NATO, it must be an active military alliance, following closely the NATO structure but functioning "out of area" as they would say in NATO. It should be realistic in numbers and in training, with accepted reinforcement potential so that any aggressor would know that the leaders of the world were—and are—prepared to stop aggression in its infancy if it were ever considered again. Then at least we will have taken some steps to put aside the concept that aggression can succeed. To provide such an alliance will take great diplomatic skill, but we should all strive for such a worthy goal.

Before I refer to a specific matter concerning Europe, I think that it is in order for me to put forward three matters of procedure to the Leader of the House. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his new post, and hope that he will look with a reforming eye to carrying through the work of the Select Committee on Procedure and drag our procedure more into line with the demands of modern life.

First, will my right hon. Friend ensure that the three European Special Standing Committees—whose appointment the House approved last month—are nominated by the Select Committee on Selection before the end of the month, and that the necessary administrative back-up for their operation is in place so that they can start to work?

Secondly, may I appeal to my right hon. Friend to find time for a debate, before Christmas, on an amendable motion, so that the House can consider and vote for the recommendations of the Procedure Committee in its 1988 report on the Committee stages of Bills? The report sets out to ensure that all sections of even controversial legislation are debated in Committee before returning to the Floor of the House, and enumerates ways of achieving that goal.

Thirdly, will the Leader of the House turn his mind at an early stage to the impasse that seems to have arisen with private Bill procedure since the report of July 1988 by the Joint Committee on Private Bill Procedure? It is not for my Committee to comment, as its terms of reference cover only public business, but we cannot fail to notice the long-term and desperate waste of time on the Floor of the House in the present unsatisfactory state of private Bill legislation. I have just received some figures which will amaze the House. In the past Session private legislation was taken at seven o'clock on more than 27 occasions, and more than 76 hours of what would usually be termed prime time were used in this way. I know that the Committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest (Sir P. McNair-Wilson) has made recommendations which, if accepted in full, would require primary legislation, but action could be taken in certain areas merely by resolution of the House to alter Standing Orders. That would greatly assist matters. Will the Leader of the House see how that could be done quickly?

Finally on procedural matters, will my right hon. Friend take a step that could well establish him as the most popular man in the House? The major report by the

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Procedure Committee in 1979 recommended a parliamentary calendar. It argued and recommended that at the start of each Session the Leader of the House should announce the dates on which the House would rise for Christmas, Easter and Whitsun, the dates when the House would return, and the date on which it was aimed to rise for the summer recess. Those dates are clearly in the minds of officials concerned with Government business, so why not announce them this week? Of course, they could be set aside if absolutely necessary, but to establish them now would allow Ministers to organise their lives and the lives of their families in a civilised and reasonable manner which has never been possible before. That would happen without harming the Government's programme. Could not the Leader of the House try this as an experiment for a year without putting it into Standing Orders? When it was done in Canada both parties which had been against the move found it admirable; it benefited the Members and it acted as a programme to keep the civil servants working, rather than believing that Parliament was an open-ended commitment to which they could take their legislation at any time.

To return to the main subject of the debate, I ask for one more matter to be considered. Whether we like it or not, major economic decisions about the future of the European Community will be made within the next six to 24 months. Those decisions are likely to establish the economic structure of Europe for the foreseeable future, if not for 30 or 40 years. In the end, I believe that we shall have to comply with them. If so, it is imperative that our voice be listened to willingly during the negotiations and that our opinions should carry the support of our European colleagues.

Before a move is made to a single currency or to the hard ecu a central European bank will be set up. Its exact format and the manner of the political control over it have still to be settled. It is imperative that Britain has the greatest influence on these decisions. Most of our European partners are as worried as we are about the possible economic domination of Europe by a united Germany, so the siting of the headquarters of the new central European bank would naturally fit into the City of London, rather than into Paris or Bonn. But if we appear to be unco-operative Britain's voice will carry little weight and the bank will be sited elsewhere. I felt that the Prime Minister went some way in her speech yesterday towards making it clear that she wanted to co-operate towards that end, but I ask the Minister who will reply tonight to reinforce the views that I have expressed. No one expects Britain meekly to follow the views of European socialists, but if these changes are to come and if our views are to be supported by colleagues in Europe we shall be able to operate more effectively from inside, by attracting allies to our views, than by standing to one side being impolite to friends and having the initiative taken away by other nations.

I remind the House that general claims about British sovereignty do not ring very true when we realise that much of Britain's right of veto was given up when the House, following the advice of the Prime Minister, approved the Single European Act. So co-operation with our colleagues in Europe must be the best way of ensuring Britain's future influence in the European Community.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. This is an appropriate opportunity for me to remind the House that 10-minute speeches will operate from 7 pm, as foreshadowed by Mr. Speaker at the start of our debate.

6.56 pm

Sir Russell Johnston (Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber): I intend to confine my remarks mainly to our policy in the European Community and to the clamant problems in central and eastern Europe. Before that, I should like to agree with the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen): I too deeply regret the Government's failure to introduce some provision for compensation from the national health service for the haemophiliacs who acquired the HIV virus. Instead of spending the money on legal disputation, it should have been spent directly on helping this dwindling, innocent group of people. I hope that the new Secretary of State for Health will reconsider this matter, because in discussion of European matters all hon. Members go on about the sovereignty of this House. I guess that the House is almost at one in thinking that something should be done for these poor folk—so let us see the evidence that we have some sovereignty.

We Liberal Democrats are the only federalist party in the House. We have put the matter unequivocally in the amendment that we have tabled to the Loyal Address; we

"humbly regret the absence from the Gracious Speech of any coherent policy to secure for the people of the United Kingdom the benefits of the economic, monetary and political union of the European Community."

Federalism is a proven democratic instrument for achieving political union between different countries and resolving nationalist stresses within existing unions. Yesterday, the Prime Minister said:

"there are some people who want a federal Europe, and they would be prepared to sacrifice a large part of our parliamentary democracy to get it."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 30.]

That was a malign and distorted misrepresentation of the truth.

It is the Liberal Democrats and the federalists of Europe who have consistently argued for closing the democratic deficit in the European Community and strengthening the powers of the directly elected Parliament. It is the Prime Minister and others like her —many of them in the Labour party—who want to perpetuate the deeply unsatisfactory status quo in the European Community in which decisions are made behind closed doors by an oligarchy of Ministers after long negotiations by national bureaucracies, with national Parliaments such as ours being used merely as rubber stamps. The Chairman of the Select Committee on European Legislation can confirm that.

Federalism means recognising that democracy demands the exercise of democratic choice at many levels and creating institutions to make that possible. The same Prime Minister who calls forth demons at the prospect of European union did not hesitate to impose the poll tax on Scotland although she had only 10 Conservative Members there out of 72 and only about 25 per cent. or 26 per cent. of the popular vote out of a poll of 70 per cent. She apparently saw no contradiction there.

In seeking a common currency in Europe, we do not advocate any central imposition of that kind. There is a profound contradiction in the Government's thinking. However, for a federalist and a Liberal, there is no contradiction between a Scottish Parliament dealing with Scottish issues and a European Parliament dealing with European issues in which Scots are represented, and the same applies for other parts of the United Kingdom. That seems to us common sense.

Perhaps it is because the United Kingdom has such a tradition of centralised and unitary government and such a tradition of the important or supposed value of decisive strong government that we find it difficult to adjust to the idea of participating in different levels of decision making, each of which is democratically controlled.

The SDP strongman, the right hon. Member for Devonport, who sadly is not present tonight, devoted a large part of his speech to quite the oldest and most discredited device of the populist politician—setting up Aunt Sallies and knocking them down. He asked, "Suppose we had had a federalist state in 1980, could it have tackled the decisive issues of the 1980s?" His answer was no, but he gave no proof because there is none.

I do not have any proof to the contrary, but I can state that the capacity of a federal union, or indeed of any kind of alliance, to achieve a common position on any issue must be related to the desire of its members to achieve that end. The resignation of the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) was essentially about that. It was not, as the Prime Minister and others have fairly and properly said, about any particular policy. He resigned about the willingness to create the conditions for common policies. The right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East clearly felt that the Prime Minister and her Government did not have that willingness and he believed that that weakened the whole enterprise and our influence within it.

Where does the Labour party stand on this? That is a very good question. I have participated regularly in debates on the European Community.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I can testify to that.

Sir Russell Johnston: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I am seldom grateful to him, but on this occasion I am. I have participated in such debates for 20 years—rather longer than he has, I suspect.

I have expressed a consistent view in debates on the European Community and that is on the record. By comparison, the Labour party's record has been like a snake in oil—it has changed, has moved and has been difficult to grasp.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Russell Johnston: I will allow the very hon. Lady one little minute.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman. As most of his fellow countrymen have not yet accepted the Act of Union, why would they accept any closer federation with any other nation?

Sir Russell Johnston: My colleagues, friends and fellow countrymen north of the border are a great deal more internationalist than many people in Crewe.

At first, the Labour party was against the European Community. I gather that the Labour party is now against what the Government are doing. However, the Opposition are not clear about what they would like to do instead. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) did not enlighten me about the attitude of the Labour party towards economic and monetary union, far less political union.

I recall that the socialists and the social democratic parties in the European Community produced a common manifesto. However, the British Labour party introduced a derogation and stated that it could not accept the idea of the European Parliament becoming stronger. The Labour party could not go along with that. That was odd, and I wonder whether it is still the position today.

My loyalty is not to this institution—this Parliament in Westminster—but to my voters in my constituency and to my liberal beliefs. What reason have I or any Liberal Democrat to defend this House and its supposed sovereignty? This place is the vehicle through which a Government who attracted only 42 per cent. of the vote, but because of our capricious electoral system achieved a majority of 100, impose their will on the country. As we consider how we will fit into Europe, British people of a liberal democratic view do not have much to lose, but probably have a great deal to gain.

Mr. Paddy Ashdown (Yeovil): My hon. Friend has touched on one of the central misconceptions in this argument. The Prime Minister and her Cabinet and the Labour party argue the case on the basis of the sovereignty of Parliament. We should not be arguing on that basis. What matters is the sovereignty of the people. The people have as good a right and as good an interest in vesting their sovereignty in this Parliament as in the Parliament in Europe. If we were to think about the sovereignty of the people rather than the sovereignty of this House above the people, we might put the argument in the right context.

Sir Russell Johnston: Hon. Members will understand that I naturally appreciate the remarks made by my right hon. Friend.

As time is against me, I want to refer quickly to eastern Europe. The Foreign Secretary referred to the know-how fund. The hon. Member for Hamilton (Mr. Robertson) and I are on the advisory board of that fund. The fund has done a great deal of good, but it is still under-resourced and lacking in administrative capacity through the British Council. I hope that something will be done about that.

As I have said in this place before, I believe that the western alliance as a whole—the European Community and the United States—must think urgently about a major total package not just for eastern Europe, but for the Soviet Union itself, which is in dire trouble. We owe Gorbachev some support, and we must also have a more common view about that in Europe. Even a modified Soviet Union based on Russia and some Slav republics will be a major partner for Europe.

I intervened on the Foreign Secretary to ask about the Baltic states. Are the Government going to press for their representation at the CSCE summit and also press the Soviet Union to resume the independence negotiations which it has broken off?

It would also have been nice if the Foreign Secretary had referred at the beginning of this new Session to the success so far of German reunification. People like me

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have certainly not forgotten the stupidities of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) and that very peculiar ideological conference intended to examine the German psyche. Perhaps we should apologise for that several times over. No one in the Warsaw pact, Prague or Budapest would argue that it is in their best interests for the European Community to hold back its integration. They want us to do better. If we do so, we can do more for them and they could join in time.

We Liberal Democrats believe that the future of our country lies in the European Community. We are unhappy about the Government's approach. It is not a matter of agreeing about everything; it is a matter of listening to others and working with others, so that we may build something much better than we have had or would otherwise have.

7.9 pm

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Bristol, East): I preface my remarks by apologising to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the House. I reiterate the apology that I gave to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence because I shall have to leave the House some time this evening to attend an urgent engagement that I cannot avoid.

I intervened on the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) not in a spirit of animosity but to point out that, on 7 September, he said:

"We believe that any further operations found necessary, such as an air blockade, should, like operations already undertaken, be clearly and unequivocally authorised by the United Nations."—[*Official Report*, 7 September 1990; Vol. 177, c. 892.]

On 6 September, the Leader of the Opposition said:

"if further military action is necessary it should be taken under the full authority of the United Nations."—[*Official Report*, 6 September 1990; Vol. 177, c. 748.]

The right hon. Member for Gorton said today that any further action should have the widest possible support. There is a change in emphasis. It is very slight, very subtle, but also very important, and I welcome it. The Labour party has had a thoroughly responsible attitude to what has been going on in the Gulf. I welcome that change because events have changed.

The second paragraph of the Gracious Speech reaffirmed the Government's commitment to the defence of the nation. The precedence of that reaffirmation shows the priority that the Government give to defence. However, I wish to deal with one specific matter, the Gulf. Clearly, those who talked six months ago about a massive and immediate peace dividend were wrong, and it is quite interesting to note just how quiet they are today.

The United Nations has defined its objectives in the Gulf. They include an unconditional withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, and the restoration of the legitimate Government. I trust that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other leaders of the allied powers will agree that the definition of a legitimate Kuwaiti Government includes the return of the Al Sabah family. There is a variety of reasons, and for brevity I shall mention only one. If that definition is not agreed, it will signal to other sheikdoms of the Gulf and to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia something that will be inherently destabilising, undermine them and consequently damage our interests. The other objectives are freedom for hostages who are illegally and monstrously detained, and reparations. The world cannot afford those to be the only objectives, and we must insist that Iraq is denied the ability to wage a war of mass destruction. That is essential, otherwise the calm that will follow an Iraqi withdrawal will be a peace that is hollow, shallow and short.

We must therefore consider the methods that the United Nations is using. Sanctions are the main one, particularly in respect of oil exports. That will be effective. It will stop oil moving, but whether it will succeed in forcing out Iraq is a different matter altogether. We need also to be aware of the danger of Iraq bartering oil later for spare parts now. We must recognise that, however hard countries such as Turkey, Iran, Syria or Saudi Arabia try, there will be smuggling across borders. Consequently, the rich, the powerful and the decision-makers will be all right, but the poor and the hostages will suffer. When that suffering is seen on television, the west will forget that Saddam Hussein is the author of that misery and will blame sanctions.

I sometimes wonder how many allies are willing to sustain a war of limited objectives. Therefore, there is the paradox that, although, with time, sanctions will become effective, time is probably on Saddam Hussein's side. I may be wrong—sanctions may work. They may force a withdrawal, or we may find—it is a great danger—that the Kuwaiti Government, frustrated by delay, decide to buy off Iraq for £15 billion, for Bubiyan island and Warbah on the Shatt al Arab. I hope not, but I do not know. However, I know that, however effective sanctions are and whether or not Kuwait decides to take unilateral action, it nevertheless is likely to permit Saddam Hussein to remain in power. It is likely to permit a tyrant to claim a victory, however illusory. It is likely to allow that wicked dictator, in two to three years, to threaten a nuclear holocaust, and a nuclear holocaust that he would not hesitate to carry out.

On 6 June 1985, in a debate on the non-proliferation treaty, in which I mentioned Iraq, I said:

"I am convinced that if nuclear war ever broke out it would not be initiated by the super powers but by a nation without any sense of responsibility, where power is concentrated in the hands of the evil, the insane or the bigoted dictator."—[*Official Report*, 6 June 1985; Vol. 80, c. 537.]

Under the heel of Saddam Hussein, Iraq is a nation without any sense of responsibility, where power is concentrated in the hands of a bigoted and evil dictator. Unless others can find a better way of fulfilling both objectives—withdrawal and the denial to Iraq of the means of mass destruction—I am driven to the reluctant conclusion that force may have to be used.

There are risks. There are political, humanitarian and military risks. There is the risk to Ras Tanura, a major source of western oil, there is the risk to Israel, there is the risk of the indiscriminate use of chemical weapons by Iraq, and even if it were a predominantly air war, there would be major casualties. There would be fewer casualties than in a land war, but there would be a major number. Even if the bombing or whatever action allied air forces took was so precise so as not to hurt one hair on the head of any hostage, I have absolutely no doubt that Saddam Hussein would slaughter some and blame it on allied action.

We are also told that there is the risk of alienating Arab opinion. Having travelled extensively through that region, the near east and the middle east, for many years, I believe that the idea that the Arab world is united is wrong. The Arabs are no more united today than the Christians were

in the 15th century. Nor are even the Palestinians pro-Iraqi. They are anti-American—a country that they fear and envy.

There is a danger with the press as well. There is the Kate Adie factor whereby a competent, honest and inquiring journalist is pressured by time, is unwittingly directed and consequently manipulated by an Iraqi dictatorship and therefore gives a wrong portrayal of events. At the same time, colleagues in Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar and so on give information or indulge in a form of speculation that damages the chances of allied forces. There are great risks, but those who oppose the use of force must answer whether they are prepared to countenance an Iraq, under the heel of a malign dictator, that is armed with nuclear, biological and chemical weapons, and if not, what would they do?

I notice, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I have only a few more seconds, so I shall conclude. There is much to be done in the region, and a newly coherent United Nations is the body to do it. There are the issues of just settlement of the Palestine question, and of an arms embargo on Iran, Syria and Iraq, but the priority now is to expel Iraq from the sovereign state of Kuwait and to deny Iraq the weapons of mass destruction.

7.19 pm

Mr. Peter Archer (Warley, West): It is inevitable that a debate on foreign affairs should be somewhat unstructured because, by definition, it includes all human activity outside our coastlines. So I hope that the hon. Member for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed) will forgive me if I do not follow him because, in the interest of time, I shall concentrate on one issue, which was adverted to in speeches from both Front Benches but understandably not developed. I refer to the issue that has come to be called again "the Palestine question". I raise it largely in self-defence because I have been asked from a number of quarters whether my reticence on the subject in our debate in September was calculated. It was not; it was a response to constraints on time. It is true that some of the allegations made in that debate went unanswered, which is why I crave the indulgence of the House tonight.

I begin by applauding the Government's insistence that no kind of enforced concession by Israel is on offer as the price of President Hussein's withdrawal from Kuwait. There is no link between the two situations. No one should be encouraged to hope that there is a sacrificial lamb available for that purpose.

I am old enough to remember each phase of this unhappy story since 1947. I have seen the successive stages of the tragedy, each leading inevitably to the next. I have seen each side, like the characters in a Shakespearean drama, reacting to situations that they did not create or seek—and reacting in very much the way in which I suspect that I should have reacted in their respective situations. I have seen the temptation for well-intentioned people in other countries, at a safe distance from the violence, to pontificate about how those concerned should behave, rather like a trainer shouting instructions to his fighter from outside the ring. I have also seen that happen in Northern Ireland.

I believe that we are under an obligation to try to act in the role of peacemakers, but I do not think that we shall best achieve that by echoing the indignation of those most closely involved. Of course, we cannot ignore infringements of human rights whether they are on the west bank, in Jerusalem, in Iraq or Kuwait, in the gaols of Syria or in the villages of Kurdistan. I understand when my Israeli friends say, "But do you know about the atrocities in the Arab countries? Have you read Amnesty International's report on Kuwait? Why are they never mentioned?", and I understand the situation faced by the young soldiers on Temple Mount. Much of the blame rests with those who orchestrated that situation. But we have to say to the Israeli authorities—as some of us have tried to say to the authorities in Northern Ireland—"It is no service to the rule of law when those charged with enforcing it believe that it does not apply to them." One cannot invoke Satan to cast out Satan.

I understand that each side can complain of past wrongs. The Arabs are entitled to say that, on any showing, their interests were involved in the events of 1947 and that, at the least, they had some rights, but they were not consulted. They are entitled to say that the need for a Jewish homeland had arisen partly at least because of bigotry and anti-semitism in Europe and yet Europe had solved its problem not at its own expense, and paid its guilt money not from its own account, but at the expense of the Arabs. I understand that that is why in 1947 they refused to recognise Israel's right to exist and why in 1948 they refused to recognise the decision of the United Nations.

For its part, Israel is entitled to say that in 1948 it was prepared to accept the compromise that had commended itself to the United Nations; that it was Israel which was attacked in 1948 by seven armies; that the rest of the world did not lift a finger to save it or to make peace, but settled down to watch in the expectation that Israel would be destroyed, and its people possibly massacred, and that Israel's survival rested not on any international guarantees, but on its own defensive capability. Israel is entitled to say that it occupied the west bank in consequence not of a war in which Israel was the aggressor, but of a naked attack on Israel, which was declared even by the Security Council to be an act of aggression, and that, again, Israel's survival rested on its own efforts. Israel is entitled to say that it was nearly destroyed because the country east of Jordan is so narrow as to be virtually indefensible against a sudden attack, and that its presence on the west bank was originally a strategic one. Israel is entitled to say that between 1983 and 1987 Iraq, Egypt, Saudia Arabia and Syria acquired military equipment to a total value of $42 billion, while Israel acquired equipment worth only $3 billion.

There is nothing more pointless than to preach at either or both sides without showing some understanding of what it is like to be part of that unhappy situation. However, it remains the case that along with resentment, recriminations and anxieties, all the people concerned share a deep hunger for peace and a recognition that there is no other avenue to security and prosperity. That peace will have to be reached on the basis of compromise—and "compromise" is an easy word to say. But for both sides, a compromise would mean giving up something that it sees as important because there cannot be a painless compromise. It may have to entail an element of risk, although I hope that we should be wary of urging either side to buy peace at a price that we should not wish to see imposed on this country.

But this generation has no right to condemn posterity to a perpetual state of war. A compromise there must be,

[Mr. Peter Archer]

but it can be achieved only by meeting and talking. The Israeli Labour party is right about that of course. It would be easier to persuade the Israeli people if Mr. Arafat were more consistent in his statements about violence; if he were to revise his view that President Hussein made "a great speech" when he threatened to destroy half of Israel with chemical weapons; or if he repudiated Mr. Al Abbis' statement after the coastal operation in May, that the policy of the Palestine Liberation Organisation is still as defined by the Palestine National Council's endorsement of the armed struggle in 1988. If Mr. Arafat disagrees with that, it would be easy for him to say so.

There need to be talks. But this country would not help that process by attempting to prescribe in advance the conclusions that should emerge from those talks. It may be necessary to distinguish between settlement on the west bank and a right to some defensive arrangements that would not confine Israel within an indefensible border. It may be necessary for everyone to accept that the deep emotions felt about east Jerusalem by three of the world's major religions require some special arrangements.

All the parties may need to break away from the assumption that every square inch of the earth's surface must fall within the exclusive and inviolable territorial jurisdiction of a single nation state. Certainly, I believe that that assumption has outlived its usefulness. But Israel must be prepared to discuss these matters. We would contribute best to that process, not by becoming involved in the arguments, but by urging both sides to concentrate less on the past than on the future, and to emphasise that a moderate is not necessarily either a traitor or a coward. If we cannot effect a reconciliation, we should not indulge ourselves in words that drive the participants more deeply into a fortress mentality. If we cannot reduce the temperature, at least we should not be hellbent on exacerbating it. If we cannot heal the wounds, it does not follow that we should seek to make them deeper and wider.

There is no time to elaborate further, but I believe that the view that I have expressed is the view of the Government. If so, many people will welcome it if the Secretary of State for Defence endorses that view when he replies.

7.29 pm

Mr. George Gardiner (Reigate): I was glad that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary devoted such an important part of his speech today to the situation in the Gulf which, of course, has moved on considerably since it was last discussed in the House. I wish to take up and briefly develop the point that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made towards the conclusion of her speech yesterday. She said:

> "Time is running out for Saddam Hussein . . . either he gets out of Kuwait soon, or we and our allies will remove him by force, and he will go down to defeat with all its consequences. He has been warned."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 34.]

I submit that it is essential for us to prepare the British public for the momentous and hard decisions that must soon be taken on the Gulf. No one likes or glories in war, but we must establish in advance why war will probably be necessary.

International sanctions have been in place for three months now and have had absolutely no effect in persuading Saddam Hussein to disgorge Kuwait. Indeed, throughout that time he has continued his rape and pillage of that sad country and evinced a cruelty that was movingly illustrated by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary today and, indeed, by the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman. At the same time, Saddam Hussein has played a sadistic cat-and-mouse game with innocent hostages.

Sanctions have perhaps served a useful purpose demonstrating the near-unanimous international disapproval of his aggression, but anyone who puts his faith in sanctions alone to achieve the United Nations declared objectives is sadly deluding himself. Several of us were of that view when sanctions were first put in place. Since then, several studies have been made of their likely effect, most notably by *The Economist* intelligence unit. Its report published last month concluded that sanctions would be damaging to Iraq only in the long term and possibly not before the end of next summer.

We have seen a pretty effective sea and air blockade, but it it is hard to make a land blockade effective. There is easy seepage across the border with Iran and the western border with Jordan is highly porous. Some hope was expressed for the efficacy of sanctions when Iraq imposed petrol rationing. One thing of which Iraq is not short is oil, but Iraq feared a lack of imported additives. Yet soon after it was discovered that it could manufacture its own additives, and petrol rationing has been lifted. There is nothing like sanctions for encouraging import substitution.

The 1990 harvest in Iraq was good, giving it enough grain to last several months. After that it might be in difficulty, but can we imagine the western world even wanting to starve Iraq into submission? Could we resist pictures on television every night of babies crying for food? Of course not. How could the United Nations ever cast itself in the role of the Government of Ethiopia and deliberately use starvation as a political weapon? I am sure that we would not. Sanctions will cause discomfort to the Iraqi people and perhaps even distress but they will never cause them to rise up and topple Saddam Hussein. He has far too strong a power base to make that even possible. Sanctions alone will never free the people of Kuwait.

Some people urge us to give sanctions more time to work. Undoubtedly, more time will be given, but I ask those people this question: for how long should we give sanctions the chance to work? Should we wait six months, nine months or 12 months? When that time has expired, would those people be prepared to sanction military action, or is their total reliance on sanctions a way of dodging reality, a cloak for what is at root appeasement?

Meanwhile, we have the steady build-up of allied forces in Saudi Arabia and other states and in the waters of the Gulf. There are already more than 240,000 United States troops on the ground. Two further armoured divisions and support forces will bring the figure to 350,000. Britain has an armoured division there and more. Warships from many nations are in Gulf waters and the allies have an impressive concentration of air power. It will not be physically or politically possible to keep such a large allied force in a state of full alert in such punishing conditions for a further six or nine months or whatever in the slim hope that sanctions will do their job for them. If the forces are to stay there, I fear that they must soon be used.

A further and valid reason to support military action was touched on earlier. It would give us the chance to take

out Saddam Hussein's growing nuclear capability. There is little doubt among experts that after the severe setback of the Israeli attack on the Osirak reactor in 1981, Iraq is racing to acquire nuclear weapons. Estimates of how long it will take vary. Some say two years, others say more. Perhaps Iraq could make only a limited number of nuclear warheads, but in the hands of a man who has shown how cheerfully he can deploy chemical weapons against his own people, they would constitute a danger far greater than faces us now. It could be a choice between military action now or nuclear war in a couple of years.

So it is our duty and the Government's duty to prepare the public by explaining the logic of military action. For when that action comes it must be fast, without any warning beyond that which has already been given. We shall wake up one morning to discover that we are at war, and our people must be left in no doubt of the justice and necessity of that war.

7.38 pm

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I wish that once in a while I could be called before the hour of 7 o'clock. I find it not a little irksome that I am constantly limited to 10 minutes and hence unable to realise the expectations of the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) about Ulster Unionist Members when they speak in the House. The time limit on my speech means that I must confine it to matters which are of immediate importance to the people whom I represent.

This year was the eighth time that I have listened to Her Majesty's Gracious Speech. When I go to listen to it I am warmed for a moment by the way in which the Government's intentions are stated—briefly and effectively as if they were to be pursued honourably. Unfortunately, that feeling does not last for long. When I turn back towards this Chamber I realise that I have to face yet another year of evasion, equivocation and mental reservation on some of the fine ideals contained in the Most Gracious Speech. It states:

"My Government attach the highest priority to national security, and to the preservation of international peace with freedom and justice . . . My Government will work . . . for the unconditional implementation of the resolution of the United Nations Security Council . . . My Government will maintain their efforts to secure the release of all Britons held hostage . . . in the Middle East . . . My Government will maintain their fight against terrorism in the United Kingdom and overseas . . . In Northern Ireland, my Government will be resolute in their efforts to defeat terrorism."

Unfortunately, the Government's record does not reassure me on any of those points.

As I listened to the Foreign Secretary today I recalled a speech by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Heffer) before the recess. He reminded us that perhaps all of us were less than honourable in the way in which we went about the business of the House. I sometimes feel that we are far too bound by three-line Whips to vote for measures which return to haunt us as the months and years pass. Not least in that category is the situation that we face in the middle east.

For several years we turned a blind eye to the iniquities of Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi army in the genocide of the Kurdish people, and supported Saddam's Government. Nor is our relationship with Sudan able to be justified. How can we continue to ignore the plight of the tribes in the south which are being systematically exterminated. At the beginning of a new Session it behoves us all to mean what we say and to ensure that we do not build up for this nation a dishonourable and almost disreputable name in the world.

It is extremely difficult for us now to embark upon war, but I agree with the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Gardiner) that we are bound for a war in the middle east. Although the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) seemed almost to argue against enjoining battle with Saddam, he pointed out that if we did not do so we might be in a worse position next year or the year after. I ask all Members of the House to encourage our Government to think about what is honourable and truly British as they deal with international affairs.

I will say nothing more about the Gulf, but will turn closer to home. Another important issue in foreign affairs is the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic. The Queen's Speech states that the Government

"will maintain positive relations with the Republic of Ireland."

What does that mean? Does it mean that we shall pursue the same futile objective through the Anglo-Irish Agreement as we have been pursuing over the past five years?

I am pleased to see the Secretary of State for Defence on the Front Bench. It is proper for me to remind him how when he sold the agreement to us he told us that it would copper-fasten the union in perpetuity. Neither he nor I can believe that any longer because during the McGimpsey court case article 1 of the agreement was cast to one side. Counsel for the Irish Government spelt out what it meant when he said, "It is not defined at all, my Lord. It is carefully not defined." He was speaking about the status of Northern Ireland.

We must recognise that articles 2 and 3 of the Irish constitution are even more relevant in the relationship between the Irish Republic and the United Kingdom. They enshrine a harsh, uncompromising, territorial claim on Northern Ireland. That irredentist attitude has not been weakened one whit by the agreement. Therefore, it behoves the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to ensure that a new basis is established whereby the totality of relationships between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic can be properly and honourably defined.

It is not without significance that on 24 October during Question Time in the Dail the Taoiseach was questioned by the leader of Fine Gael, Mr. Alan Dukes, the leader of the Workers party, Mr. Proinsias de Rossa, and the leader of the Irish Labour party, Mr. Dick Spring. Each pressed him to consider what might be done in relation to articles 2 and 3.

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): That is good.

Mr. Maginnis: Of course it is good, but it would be even better if some of our Ministers would get off their backsides and press for articles 2 and 3 to be reconsidered. They have avoided facing the necessity of doing so. While they fail to do so, the people of Northern Ireland suffer. There is no impetus for the Irish Government to do anything about the IRA terrorists from Donegal who directed a bomb into a checkpoint where it killed five of

[Mr. Maginnis]

our soldiers and an innocent civilian who they had tied to the seat of the vehicle in which they had forced him to transport it.

I realise that I have run out of time. I wished to make many other points. We have hostages in Northern Ireland held by paramilitaries and we must not forget them any more than the hostages held in the middle east.

7.48 pm

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend (Bexleyheath): The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) knows that I do not share his views on the Anglo-Irish Agreement, but I pay tribute to him for his determination to eradicate terrorism from Northern Ireland.

I have listened to our brief debate on foreign affairs this evening and two issues dominate rather as Mount Kenya and Kilimanjaro dominate the plains of east Africa. They are the Gulf crisis and our European future.

When Saddam Hussein went into Kuwait I desperately hoped that Britain, which knows the Gulf area better than any other European country and certainly better than the United States, would give a worthy and honest lead. I congratulate the Prime Minister and the Government on the lead that we, in conjunction with the United States, have given to the rest of the world.

We should be bracing our countrymen and women for the possibility of a winter war even though I hope that a diplomatic and peaceful solution will be found. It has been said that one can do many things with bayonets except sit on them. We recall the Royal Marine commandos being tossed about in the Atlantic storms. We either had to put them in, which we did successfully, or take them back to Ascension and Gibraltar. If it is decided to use force to remove Iraqi troops from Kuwait, I shall understand the arguments.

My other mountain is how we in Britain and in Europe can build up a united, free enterprise, non-protectionist Europe. In Britain and in the two major parties we are not doing very well. In 1983 the Labour party was anti-European. It is trying to catch up fast, but there are some laggards. In my party a small tail wagging the dog minority is opposed to our European future. As I said earlier, some of them have produced a pamphlet saying that we should join up with outer Europe, whatever that is supposed to mean. What an election slogan for Bexleyheath—"Vote for the Conservative party and go down to the second division." In due course the Government will have to stare down that small minority, many of whom honestly opposed Europe from the start and voted against it in the House.

Hon. Members have spoken about my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), a man of many talents and abilities. Like many of my hon. Friends, I was greatly embarrassed by his comments on Germany. I lived in Berlin for two years with the British Army. Germans under the age of 60 bear no responsibility whatever for the events that led to the second world war. Anyone who looks at the way in which West Germany has performed since the end of the war will see an astonishing story that cannot be bettered by any European country. Its public transport, social welfare and social cohesion are truly remarkable. One of the mistakes made by our Government over the years—and I am sure that a Labour Government would have made the same mistake—was to follow too closely the United States and not closely enough West Germany. We were interlocked with the Reagan Administration and already American historians are saying that it was a fairly quirky regime. However, I do not have time to explore that. Some members of the Government believe that our relationship with the United States is paramount, but in 1990 that is a dangerous mistake. That relationship is incredibly important in the context of the nuclear aspect of the Gulf crisis, but in general it is an outdated concept. If the United Kingdom is to get anywhere, we must build up a united Europe. That is what the United States wants us to do. It has given the message, "Do not regard us as close at the expense of your Community partners." We should understand that message.

John Banham, the distinguished director-general of the CBI, talking about currencies, said:

> "We do not want the United Kingdom's ultimate commitment to a single currency to be called into question. We believe that a single currency is good for Britain."

He added that CBI members were

> "absolutely committed to playing a full and expanding role in Europe."

Some of my hon. Friends will say that that is Euro-fanaticism, but it is not. It is the view of those in business and commerce who are trying to increase exports to the continent. It is the view of many of our people who are in their 20s and 30s even if it is not the view of those who are in their 60s and 70s, and we should understand on which side the future lies.

I should be happy to see a common currency. The other day one of the tabloids suggested that the Conservative election platform would be defending the pound sterling against foolish foreigners. Can we think of anything more ridiculous? For a start, every hon. Member knows that in due course we shall join because there is no alternative. Such a move would be popular. Young people who are used to travelling around Europe fail to understand why there should be artificial currency barriers between one country and another.

We have made a fundamental mistake in our approach to Europe. In a curious way for Britain, over the years we have drained out of the discussion the sense of idealism. It was said that Kennedy was an idealist without an illusion. Iain Macleod wittily described Harold Wilson as an illusionist without ideals. There is an element of idealism in the European Community. My grandfather was in the Royal Navy and was a beachmaster at Gallipoli and my father was seriously wounded at Dunkirk. Both world wars came about because western Europe was divided. In my lifetime, during which I was a regular soldier for 10 years, there was no further war on the European mainland. There are two reasons for that—nuclear weapons and the attempt to build up a united western Europe.

Another matter that we must consider is the future. I have two sons aged 11 and nine. When I talk about Europe in my constituency and in the House I am thinking of their future and about the pollution that we must clear up in Europe. How can we deal with a polluted Rhine that is pouring rubbish into the North sea except on a united European basis? How can we build up European industry to compete with Japan and the far east without a sense of European identity? I say to the Government, "Raise your

sights and give us some vision, otherwise our people will perish." The British people would respect a lead and follow it. Let us have it.

7.56 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I hesitate to intrude on the grief of the hon. Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend) but I think that he rather misunderstands what his Government have done. Occasionally, I have to explain to some of my European colleagues that it was the Prime Minister who used her power to push the Single European Act through Parliament. I voted against it because I was perfectly clear about what it would do. However, the Conservative Government went ahead and are now managing with a trick of mirrors to appear to be facing both ways at the same time. That is not a new art because they have exercised it for many years. It is a dangerous practice and the hon. Member for Bexleyheath spoke with honesty about some of the implications. I hope that my voters will read carefully what he said because most of them will be totally opposed to every single word.

The problem of misrepresentation is very important. I listened with great care to the Foreign Secretary, especially when he spoke about the Gulf, because I am deeply concerned at the way in which a legitimate argument about what is happening in a volatile part of the world is increasingly being used as an argument for what is fashionably called linkage. Linkage is the theory by which we take the political situation that arises following the invasion of a friendly country by one of its neighbours and its occupation and destruction as a counterweight to the position elsewhere. The argument is, "If we are to find a solution with all the Arab states, the only thing to do is to bring about a state of affairs in other parts of the middle east that can be put into the balance and used to solve the problem."

That argument would be acceptable if we were talking about like meeting like. Before the Government forget the true implications of accepting an argument such as that posed by those who talk about linkage, we must understand some of the things that have been happening in the intifada. It is very noticeable that a country with a clear record of allowing the media in and discussing what is happening because of its difficult internal situation is somehow being likened to a dictator who took action with no consultation, and certainly with no intention of finding an equitable political solution. We must resist the argument that the situation in Israel is equivalent to that in the Gulf. It is not, it has not been and it will not be. We do enormous disservice to the political problems in the middle east if we attempt—by inference, or because we think we can buy off moderate Arab votes—to link those two in the way that has been suggested, mainly by people such as Saddam Hussein.

We hear about the intifada but we rarely hear about the number of Israelis who are killed—we do not hear of the young reserve officers. Nor do we hear about incidents such as the one today in which five people infiltrated from the north of Jordan and killed a young army officer, or of the man who was stoned to death in his car because he took a wrong turning. But those incidents are just as real and damaging to the people involved.

As a mother and a grandmother I learnt long ago not to take the word of middle-aged men who urge others towards violent solutions without understanding the implications of what they are saying. I do not presume to judge how we shall reach a fair settlement in the middle east. In the final analysis, that must be for the parties concerned to decide. In a democratic country such as Israel the political parties, following and leading the wishes of the voters, must decide.

A solution must come from the sort of talks that the Israeli Labour party has tried hard to initiate, even in the face of considerable adverse comment from the Israeli electorate. The one thing that I do know is that we cannot suggest that a solution to the situation in Israel will buy us political time elsewhere in the middle east merely because we want a solution in the Gulf for our own reasons.

It is in the Israeli people's interests that a solution and pattern for the future is found in the middle east. That is where their trading links must be. They, above all, must benefit from peace and from a stable political situation, but hon. Members cannot bring that about—no matter how much we wish to do so, nor how genuinely we have the interests of the groups on either side at heart. We can influence the discussion of what is happening in the Gulf by the way in which we describe the situation, and the way in which we measure those taking part in this battle.

I pray that we shall find a peaceful solution to events in the Gulf, not least because Saddam Hussein has access to a uranium mine within his borders. I fear very much not only for the future of middle eastern countries but for our interests and those people who will be unprotected from the sort of action that a man like him could take with nuclear weapons.

When this issue has been raised in the House in the past, and when criticism has been made of the so-called trade arguments, which meant that Britain was prepared to deal with countries that were not interested in democracy or the development of a politically stable situation, the Government were not prepared to act or to investigate what was happening.

Israel is a free state. It allows open discussion within its borders, and it has the right to expect that we will at least give it a fair and honest hearing. I fear that that is not the case in the United Kingdom today. Of all people, we should understand that if we listen to only one side of a delicate and important political argument, finally we will confuse, complicate and eventually destroy all hopes of a political solution.

8.4 pm

Mr. John Bowis (Battersea): If the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) will forgive me, I shall return to the issue that she has just mentioned.

The debate has been dominated by the Gulf, quite rightly. We have heard some interesting contributions on that subject, not least from distinguished Opposition Members. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) showed the anguish of someone who understands the effects of war, whereas his right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, acknowledged the reality that sometimes one has to face up to the need to use force to prevent tyranny.

The right hon. Member for Leeds, East said that we should wait six months, but we must remember the wise and telling words of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, who gave us, in such graphic and horrific detail,

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the reasons for the need to use force earlier than one otherwise would have wished. He told us what is happening to people in Kuwait now—both British and other overseas hostages and the Kuwaitis themselves.

One has to bear in mind the question of how one deals with Iraqi aggression in Kuwait. That aggression should be reiterated again and again to the British public, so that they understand that is the reason, should we need to use force to solve the problem. All the other questions relating to Iraq's relations with Kuwait and its claims fall into place behind that.

Occasionally, it is worth while reminding ourselves of the history rather than the claimed history. Kuwait was acknowledged as a country by the international community some centuries before Iraq was so recognised, Kuwait was never part of the Basra province of the Ottoman empire—it was always outside. Since 1756, the present ruling family has been in charge of Kuwait. Iraq was only created in 1923. All the disagreements between the two countries can be brought back to the negotiating table, but, for the present, we must remember only the aggression and horror for the Kuwaitis and for the people who found themselves stranded there.

I shall return to the point where I think that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich left off, by referring briefly to my visit to Tunisia this summer. I met Tunisians who did not take Kuwait's side. They told me that they were in no sense supporters of Saddam Hussein, but they had doubts about Kuwait and its support for the poorer Arab nations. Kuwait, and perhaps Saudi Arabia, need to take on board the fact that some of the poorer Arab nations feel that they have been let down by some of the richer Arab nations.

They also told me that I must realise that some poorer Arabs take the view that the world does nothing when some country such as Palestine is annexed, but it acts when the oil-rich areas are annexed. We have to understand that point of view. It reminds us of the necessity to find solutions to the Palestinian problem as soon as we can, once this sad episode is over. We have to try to reconcile the points of view that we have heard tonight about Palestine and the Palestinians and the rights of Israel and the Israelis.

I have been to the occupied territories. I have been to the hospital in Gaza and have seen the bullet holes in those children. I have seen a little boy in Hebron with phosphorous burns, and met the mayor who had his legs blown off in an attack. I have seen the houses which were bulldozed simply because children threw stones at the occupying troops.

Both we and Israel must accept that that is not the way to find solutions to the problems in the middle east. It is not just a question of me listening to Palestinians telling me what could be exaggerated tales; it is also a question of me listening to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency and, I believe, to a Norwegian leader who was in Gaza at the time and who confirmed, very much from an impartial point of view, that that is what is happening. For the sake of peace in the world at large and in the middle east, we must rapidly find solutions to the Palestinian problem, while at the same time protecting Israel's real interests.

No one, however, must be allowed to pretend that crimes are not being committed throughout the world. It is right to encourage international jurists to come together to look at the evidence. I am not a great supporter of the War Crimes Bill. I do not believe that anyone could be given a fair trial at this distance in time. Witnesses for the defence could not be found who would be prepared to come forward and give credible evidence in court. Nevertheless, there are nationalist terrorists—Saddam Hussein is one. Certain people are also committing barbaric acts on behalf of Israel. Others, no doubt, are committing similar acts on behalf of Arab groups. We have to collect the evidence and take people to court.

We held a debate recently on Cambodia. I do not intend to rehearse the arguments that were deployed across the Floor of the House, but one underestimated argument is the need for the world community to find the evidence to bring against Pol Pot. At the moment, he is sitting pretty in Thailand. Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge leaders continue to plan to take over that country again because the world does not accept its responsibilities and does not say that that man and his henchmen must never be part of any future Government in Cambodia.

The only way to stop him is to collect the evidence; it is there. We have seen it in photographs showing the skulls of people he has murdered. That man must be hounded out of the country that he desecrated. As from the "Hound of Heaven", he flees justice. He flees him down the nights and down the days. He flees him down the arches of the years, because he will never, ever, escape international justice. We must support international justice both in this country and in the United Nations. I hope that Ministers will take that line and pursue such a policy with regard to Cambodia.

Another area of acute suffering in the world is referred to obliquely in the Gracious Speech—the suffering of many children in the world. This is not a day on which I refer to wars and pestilences or to natural or man-made disasters. It is an average day in the world. Today, 6,000 children will die of pneumonia, 7,000 of diarrhoeal dehydration and 8,000 of diseases such as measles, whooping cough and tetanus. These are children whom the world could save. New technology is not needed to save them. What is needed is 50p per child for antibiotics, 5p per child for oral rehydration therapy salts and 6·5p per child for vaccines. For the cost of one year's total tobacco advertising in the United States or one month's vodka consumption in the USSR, one could save 50 million lives.

I am so pleased that the Prime Minister made time to attend the world summit for children at the end of September and that she came back as a party to that pledge. The Gracious Speech refers to the additional aid that we are to give the developing world. I ask in particular that aid should be given to children, be it in the form of education, health care, the provision of nutritious food or clean water and sanitation. We can all unite around that cause.

At a time when we are considering the possibility of having to go to war to protect people, we ought to remember that many centuries ago there was a children's crusade to the same part of the middle east which cost the lives of 70,000 children. In this year of grace, we can perhaps unite as a world and take part in another crusade for children, by means of which we could protect some 50 million young lives.

8.14 pm

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): The hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) has just made a very compassionate speech.

I intend to speak about the Gulf crisis. Before I do so, however, may I congratulate the Foreign Secretary on his candid comment that sanctions alone will not deal with the problem? He then said that war should be avoided, if at all possible. I am also indebted to my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey), who referred to Senator Sam Nunn's comment—that all other options should be considered. As my right hon. Friend said, the truth is that it would be a very difficult war. In the event, however, of a war being needed and required, I want to make it clear that I shall support it. I do not duck that responsibility. War should not be ruled out. If at all possible, however, we should find another way.

The problem is that we are bound by a United Nations resolution that provides for unconditional withdrawal. I wonder what "unconditional" means. Does it mean that we do not even have to set out guidelines for a settlement? I intend to deal with the guidelines, first as they ought to apply to Iraq and secondly as to the response of Kuwait and the west. I want peace to be given a chance before we are driven into a war.

I believe that the Iraqi Government ought to be asked whether they would be prepared to permit at an early stage the free passage into Kuwait of an unarmed contingent of United Nations personnel to set up collection points for the evacuation of those persons in hiding, such a proposal to be the subject of negotiations between the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Iraqi Government.

Would they permit all foreign nationals currently living in Iraq the right to leave, if they so require?

Would they be prepared to withdraw from the former territory of Kuwait all Iraqi military and civilian personnel who have entered that territory since 2 August 1990?

Would they be prepared to refrain from any hostile act which might impede the restoration of the former administrative, governmental and constitutional arrangements, with a right to vote extended only to those who were residents of the former Kuwait prior to 2 August 1990?

Would they be prepared to recognise the independence and sovereignty of the state of Kuwait within the frontiers as specified in the exchange of letters of July 1932 between the Prime Minister of Iraq and the then ruler of Kuwait and as set out in the agreement of 4 October 1963, the timing of such recognition to be the subject of United Nations decision with due regard being paid to internal political conditions within Iraq?

Would they be prepared to accept the dismantling of all chemical weapons manufacturing facilities which might exist, the destruction of all chemical weapons stocks and a self-imposed ban on their use?

Would they be prepared unilaterally to renounce all development and manufacture of nuclear weapons with a clear and unambiguous affirmation of acceptance of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty?

Would they also be prepared to accept permanent international inspection arrangements in the case of all nuclear facilities in Iraq by a body to be mutually agreed but including representatives of the International Atomic Energy Agency?

Would they be prepared to accept a demilitarised zone 150 km in depth on that territory of Iraq fronting the boundaries of Iraq with Saudi Arabia and the boundaries of Iraq and the former state of Kuwait, this zone to include that land which comprises neutral Tawal territory providing for a corridor where the demilitarisation does not apply—15 km in width from a line at its southern end logitudinally 30·5° to that point in the north where the 150 km demilitarised zone no longer applies, this zone to apply for a period of five years from the signing of the agreement, at the end of five years the future of the zone to be decided by a conference of the Arab nations, with defensive forces only to be stationed in this zone and only with the approval of the United Nations?

Would they be prepared to return to the former Kuwait all confiscated assets, including bank deposits, reserves, works of art, plant and equipment, aircraft, vehicles marine equipment, administrative records and all public property formerly in the ownership of Kuwaiti public bodies?

Would they be prepared to return to the former Kuwait and its citizens all that confiscated private property which can be identified as of Kuwaiti origin with agreed arrangements for the identification, wherever possible, of the former owners of such property? Would they be prepared to withdraw the threat of a missle attack against the state of Israel?

Would the Iraqi Government be prepared to accept those guidelines in return for an undertaking underwritten by the major powers that there should be arranged an international conference of the major powers on the Palestinian question with an open agenda and without prior commitment to any particular course of action? Such a conference would be convened within 12 months of a diplomatic settlement. Clearly, in presenting my case in this way it is implied that there is a form of linkage, but I am trying to avoid it.

Would the Iraqi Government be prepared to accept the guidelines in return for the following: an airlift of food and necessary supplies to Iraq to deal with immediate shortages; the lifting of the oil embargo; the normalisation of trade and diplomatic relations and the ending of sanctions; the releasing of Iraqi assets currently frozen; a negotiated settlement on the question of outstanding loans between Iraq and Kuwait with due sensitivity being paid to the problems of Iraq and any obligations placed on Iraq arising out of the present conflict and the war with Iran, such a settlement to call upon the resources of the world bank or similar multilateral financial institutions; consideration to be given to the problems of Iraqi access to the Persian Gulf with a commitment to arrange for financial support for the development of adequate oil and general trade infrastructural and port facilities for the purpose of facilitating the export of Iraqi oil in large tankers; a calm, rational and sensitive approach being adopted by the major powers to the question of war reparations for losses incurred during the conflict and on the question of allegations of mistreatment during the period of the dispute of foreign nationals and former residents of Kuwait; a United Nations sponsored geological survey and evaluation of oil reserves to establish what proportion of oil extracted from the Rumaila oil field is drawn from that part of the field which extends into Iraqi territory, the division of the oil revenues to be based on the findings of that evaluation; a declining and tapering percentage of Iraq's share of proposed Rumaila oil

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revenues to be used for the reconstruction of infrastructure lost during the course of the invasion and occupation, the scale of such a contribution to be decided upon by the Arab nations; discussions between Iraq and other Gulf states on the future volume of defence equipment and advisory personnel to be retained not only in Saudi Arabia but in the Gulf as a whole and which has been dispatched to the Gulf for reasons arising out of the most recent escalation of the conflict beginning 2 August 1990; the withdrawal of those United States, United Kingdom and allied military and civilian personnel who have been stationed in the Gulf for reasons arising out of the escalation of conflict beginning 2 August 1990; the granting, for a consideration, of the islands of Bubiyan and Warbah on a lease to Iraq and/or on the basis of some shared responsibility, to be negotiated under the auspices of either a negotiating body comprising the Arab nations or the Secretary-General of the United Nations, that both islands be treated as a de-militarised zone.

The House will recognise that the proposals I have set out involve concessions on all sides. The main concessions for Iraq would be on the question of nuclear and chemical weapons technology and the withdrawal from the territory currently occupied and annexed. My view is that movement on those points would do much to alleviate international tension and could lead to a settlement.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East opened the door today for that sort of solution. He did not spell out anything specifically. He talked of a diplomatic solution, having spent some 15 minutes addressing the House on the consequences of war. He did not rule out war, and I do not do so either. However, war must be a position of last resort. The position of first resort must be to gain some understanding and avoid war in the knowledge that that is in the wider international interest.

8.24 pm

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): I shall not follow the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) down the long route that he effectively carved out in 10 minutes. I want to talk about the collapse of the Soviet empire.

Hon. Members will remember that a few days ago the people of Moscow witnessed a military parade to celebrate the 73rd anniversary of the October revolution in 1917. Therefore, that recollection is an opportunity for us to be reminded that there was not a smooth transition between the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy and the move to complete control by the Bolshevik or Communist party, in what became the Soviet Union. In fact, for four or five years, there was absolute anarchy from the east to the west and from the north to the south of the former Tsarist empire. As a result, some areas were controlled by the left, some by the right, some by the monarchists, by the hard left, the military and all sorts of combinations. It was not until 1924 that total control was exercised by the Bolshevik Government forces.

The two decades that followed saw the death of some 38 million people under Stalin. I have a vague and horrible feeling that, if we are not careful, the Soviet Union will not slide into the warlord anarchy of the 1920s, but there will be a growth of unsettled nation states that have an ethnic root as their raison d'etre and that the enforced co-operation that existed from 1924 until the appointment of President Gorbachev will disappear. Thus, having overthrown one form of central control, the Soviet Union might now descend into anarchy.

For example, on 28 October, elections were held in the autonomous republic of Georgia. The Communist party of Georgia hoped to win that election but managed to poll just over 20 per cent. of the popular vote. According to *The Economist*, Georgia is set to become the sixth Soviet autonomous republic to declare independence. The article in *The Economist* goes on to say:

> "The Soviet Union is a patchwork of nationalities. It contains nearly 200 linguisitic groups . . . In nine Soviet republics out of the 15, 30 per cent. of the population belongs to one or more minority groups. This hugely complicates the appeal to nationalism as a basis for self-government."

What of the lot of the ordinary Muscovite or Leningradian who has perestroika and glasnost on one side and the possibility of starving children on the other? Reform versus food is a potent dilemma for the ordinary family struggling to stay alive in the Soviet Union.

What time scale can we see for the growth of democracy in the Soviet Union? There are those who would hanker romantically after the old ways and the old days. They will say, "It was not like this under Stalin, Andropov or Chernenko." The generals in what passes for the military clubs in the Soviet Union will undoubtedly sit around and plan and plot accordingly.

The question for the House, for this democracy and for this continent is not so much whether the slide into anarchy happens—I hope that it does not—but what happens to the huge nuclear weaponry that the Soviet Union possesses, given animosity between not only one former autonomous republic and another but between ethnic groups in those autonomous republics.

There are clearly two schools of thought. The first is that the Soviet Union should be allowed to collapse into a morass of anarchy. Thousands, if not millions, of ordinary decent people would suffer the immense consequences of that, and in place of the regime under President Gorbachev there might grow something worse. The second is to keep alive the faint but struggling light of democracy by giving as much assistance as we can in political support, moral support, food, equipment and technical advice so that President Gorbachev can steer his reforms from the choppy waters of semi-anarchy into the perhaps still waters of industrial democratic development. I prefer the second school of thought.

I hope, like many other hon. Members, that we shall seek to involve the east European nations as early as we can in the Community to achieve the stability that is necessary in the east. I commend the motion to the House.

8.30 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): I commend the hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) for not using his full time. I followed his remarks on the Soviet Union with interest, as I did the remarks of the hon. Member for Bexleyheath (Mr. Townsend), who discussed Europe. I shall confine my remarks to events in the middle east and the Gulf.

Labour Members believe in international order, and that it is best combined with international authority. We all know the difficulties that we have had since 1945 in using international authority, because the United Nations has never functioned as it was designed to function. Developments in the Soviet Union, to which the hon.

Member for Dartford referred, have created the opportunity and climate for the international community, through the United Nations, to act in concert, as it has in the Gulf, with a series of United Nations resolutions passed in the Security Council, designed to place pressure on Saddam Hussein and his Government to withdraw from Kuwait.

I was in France when those events took place in early August. There were interviews on French television with high authorities in Baghdad, all of whom said, "Forget about Kuwait. Once Saddam Hussein has entered Kuwait, he is not leaving." That position has not altered one iota since then. Sanctions, the taking of hostages, the propaganda of those calling on Muslims throughout the Muslim world to involve themselves in a holy jihad and the propaganda about the United States congressional elections have all tried to cloud our eyes with a variety of dusts to weaken the resolve of the world community in relation to Saddam Hussein.

That does not mean that I believe that there should be a war in the Gulf. The hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Gardiner) spoke of sanctions, how long they could work and how long they should be allowed to work. In the early stages of the crisis, we spoke of the politics of a long haul. We agreed that sanctions would not be a panacea that would work quickly.

We must link sanctions with diplomacy. It is interesting that as Secretary Baker travels through the capitals of the countries involved in the coalition against Saddam Hussein he is getting two specific messages: first, that sanctions should be given time to work and, secondly, that a United Nations resolution will be required for military action.

I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), who spoke of the need for the widest international response in the widest international sense of coming together. The message that Secretary Baker is getting—I hope that he will be given the same message when he comes to London tomorrow—is that a United Nations resolution is the appropriate way of keeping the coalition together. I recognise the difficulties involved, but nevertheless keeping the consensus is in the interests of the world community and, ultimately, in the interests of Kuwait.

I have never shared the view of some Labour Members that it is not right to go to war under article 51 but that it might be right to do so under article 42. There is no moral basis in that argument. If one is a pacifist I can understand the argument, but if one is not, it is a matter of semantics to decide what article should be used to go to war.

I believe in the policy of the long haul. Diplomacy should be linked to that policy. There should be a long and patient effort to remove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait. We have heard much about linkage, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who made his first speech on foreign affairs for 11 years. Hon. Members will be aware what we have lost and missed in those 11 years, and I hope that he will soon contribute to other foreign affairs debates.

The fact is that we cannot link events in the Gulf with those in Israel and the occupied territory. However, because of the new climate in international affairs and the consensus between the Soviet Union and the United States, which involves China, there is now a framework for a proper international conference to deal with the problems of the middle east. In dealing with those problems, we should have to deal with the essential issue of the Palestinians, the west bank, Gaza and the Lebanon. After 16 years, the civil war in Lebanon is coming to an end. There is a resolution, which perhaps not all of us think proper, to get the militia out of Beirut and Lebanon. Possibly we shall reach the stage when Syrian forces can withdraw, and once there is security on the Israeli-Lebanese border perhaps we can get the Israelis to withdraw as well.

My hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) put a question to the Foreign Secretary about Kurdish refugees on the Turkish border. We know how the Kurds have been gassed, killed and flung out of their villages. Some of them reached our country only a few weeks ago and sought political asylum. Why not involve the Kurds in the international conference? If we did, we should be, in a sense, taking up the international conference of Versailles from 1918 to 1921 and seeing how we could consider the middle east and redress a series of grievances that have been allowed to fester over many decades.

There is the question of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons in the middle east. I had a conversation in one of the committee rooms in Bradford, North this week with a Labour party member who reminded me of a conversation that he had some 10 years ago with my hon. Friend the Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), saying that if there was to be a nuclear war it was likely to be in the middle east. With the threat of chemical weapons being used and severe retaliation, that may not be far from the truth. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) said, once one begins a war, one never knows where it will end. There are massive dangers for the middle east and for the world in a war that gets out of hand. Therefore, any international conference on this subject must look at the issue of biological, chemical and nuclear weapons.

I have made a brief tour of circumstances in the Gulf. I hope that the advice that Mr. Baker gets in London will be that diplomacy must be brought to bear. There must be a long haul on sanctions and, if possible, a further United Nations resolution. We live in a global village that is fragile and apprehensive. None of us knows how the future in the middle east will evolve, but we must believe in peace. We must not allow ourselves to fall into the trap of saying that there is no alternative. The alternative lies in diplomacy, sanctions, the long haul and the cohesion of the international community. I commend those views to the House.

8.40 pm

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on a magnificient speech. I was particularly charmed by his views on Europe. He went into the brighter side of Europe's institutions. The Queen's Speech refers to

"balanced and verifiable measures of arms control."

I understand from my right hon. Friend's speech that on 19 November a treaty will be signed to bring about the removal of 100,000 weapons from the European war zone.

These are momentous times. The CSCE in Paris, involving 34 sovereign states, will become the centre of a framework for a major institution for Europe. I am concerned, however, that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary did not mention by name another European institution, the Western European Union. However, all the

[Mr. James Hill]

implications were there—he mentioned the European pillar of defence, which is the WEU, and said that we would definitely need a roving European-backed military force. We have had that in the Gulf. The navies of the western European countries were in the region during the Iran war and they are there now during the present deadlock.

Political union in Europe has been mentioned increasingly. The Liberal Democrats are all for federalisation, saying that we will all speak with one voice. Having served a total of 14 years in European institutions, some of those years in the European Parliament under the double mandate and 11 years in the Council of Europe, I know that we do not speak with one voice. That is obvious to everyone. There will be disagreements from time to time. I believe that political union must be put on the back burner this time because monetary union will be difficult to achieve. There is a danger that we are producing, through the Commission and the European Parliament, a mass of European legislation, some of which is almost unenforceable. We all know that unenforceable law is poor law.

The emphasis in the European Parliament—I respect most of its work—is to get a mandate for defence and for foreign affairs, but that has never been in the treaty of Rome. The European Parliament should concern itself with Europe's trading arrangements, prepare the level playing field, look at competition policy and make sure that France and Germany obey the laws and that we trade equally with each other. It would be a retrograde step to hand over defence or foreign affairs to the European Parliament.

I am also worried about competition. We have a wonderful team of auditors in Luxembourg scrutinising the Commission's financial affairs and the regulations that come from the Commission and from time to time we get a report. Those matters do not get much publicity here, but I believe that once a year we should get a report from the auditors so that we can at least say that we are scrutinising the Commission with a view to cutting out waste. There is as much waste in Europe as in any other area. For too long, the House of Commons and the House of Lords have not tried hard enough to pin down details of that waste which is so professionally pointed out by the auditors in Luxembourg.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said that four states wanted to join the European Community. That is one good reason why we must curb the excesses of the common agricultural policy. Apparently, we have had some success this week, with 30 per cent. off subsidies, but I am cynical about that. We must wait and see how other countries manage their affairs. The addition of four new states would bring membership to 16, which is a long way off the CSCE total of 34. As we well know, there are 24 nations in the Council of Europe. We must ensure that there are not too many institutions for Europe. We certainly do not want excessive duplication of institutions —in other words, more and more waste.

How curiously the scene changes in one year. Last year, the focus of attention was Hong Kong. The year before, it was Afghanistan; and the middle east is a perennial favourite. We have talked about the problems in Angola and in central Europe, where the Securitate was killing people only a year ago. We are now concentrating on one of the biggest issues that has ever come before the United Nations. Like my colleagues, I am worried about sanctions. Can we starve a country of many millions of people? Can we allow such scenes to be seen on television by the British public? Would there be any political support for that action? Sanctions in the long term would affect only the lower stratum of the Iraqi community; the rest would live exactly as they did before. We must ensure that we do not talk with two voices. Are we saying that, if we want sanctions to work, we are prepared to see a whole nation starve to death? I do not think that many politicians would want to do that.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary outlined some of the horrific details of the actions of the Iraqi forces in Kuwait. We have not discussed that enough, although I have asked a couple of questions in the House about it. We have been living almost in a Walter Mitty world, saying, "Here we have a lovely little war in Kuwait, but no one has died. It was all done so quickly that there were no casualties." But that is wrong. There are many casualties. What are we going to liberate? We are going to liberate sand and the few Kuwaitis who can get away. My right hon. Friend said that there are still 500 hostages in hiding. They will be in serious danger, not because of the armed forces that will invade to release Kuwait but because of the Iraqi forces already there. They will become deliberately bestial in their ways.

My view is based on a piece today from the Press Association. The article, which contains a report from official journals in Baghdad, will curdle the blood of the House. It says:

> "Iraq threatened today to turn the Arabian peninsula into ashes and the Saudi oil fields into a sea of fire if attacked . . . Only Moslem shrines in Mecca and Medina would be spared if US-led forces tried to drive Iraq out of Kuwait".

We stay in Saudi Arabia and we hope that Iraq will slowly but surely turn to less emotive leaders, but I cannot see that happening. In view of all the evidence that has been piling up, I believe that we must go into Kuwait to liberate it, as the United Nations wishes. That must be done for the sake of the people in Kuwait and it must be done fairly soon.

8.50 pm

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton): The London *Evening Standard* described the Queen's Speech using the headline, "Thatcher Clears the Decks." The paper meant that the legislative programme was light so that the Government would be ready for the election. From the Prime Minister's speech yesterday and the Chancellor's autumn statement today, clearing the decks seems to mean shouting the lies louder. The Prime Minister and the Conservative party are engaged in that bluff.

The credibility of the Prime Minister and the Conservative party is damaged beyond recall by the realities that our people experience daily. Examples of the bluff are clear in the economy. The Prime Minister said that we have economic resurgence and that we are seeing the "re-industrialisation of Britain". Nobody believes that.

There is a story about the Prime Minister and the Cabinet getting caught in Regent's park zoo on the wrong side of the crocodile lake. The Prime Minister walks across the lake on the backs of the crocodiles in the style of James Bond. People say, "How did you do it, Prime Minister?" The Prime Minister undoes her jacket to reveal a T-shirt saying on one side, "We have economic resurgence" and

on the other side, "We are seeing the re-industrialisation of Britain," and says, "Even the crocodiles couldn't swallow that."

All the economic indicators tell a different story. There is high inflation and high interest rates, which are coming down slowly now because of the desperate worries about recession, but which are still high. Even the banks which make profits on high interest rates want the rate to come down because they know that debts will not be repaid. There is low growth, low investment and high unemployment, which has risen for six months running. If France and Spain are an example, after entry into the exchange rate mechanism employment is likely to rise by another 1 million in the next one year to 18 months.

Last year, the balance of payments deficit was £19·1 billion on the current account—the highest on record—and was £13·2 billion in the first nine months of this year. The Prime Minister said that there is more investment here from the United States, from Germany and from Japan. The balance of payments debt is being paid by the ownership of Britain by those countries. In the words of the Confederation of British Industry, the United Kingdom is "ripe for takeover"—and, I might add, on the cheap.

The Tories claim that public services are safe in their hands, but we see public squalor. Our people know that there is squalor in our public transport system and that there is neglect, from a mere lick of paint to the lack of investment in new rail lines. Our people know that the NHS has been destroyed by hospital closures, health authority debt and longer waiting lists. There is no new public housing, so we have cardboard city, and there is no major infrastructure work for the future. We have no clean-up plans for our rivers and no plans for a new sewerage system.

The Prime Minister attacked borrowing. What is wrong with borrowing to invest for the future? The cost of worth while projects such as sewerage systems and the cleaning up of our rivers can be shared with future generations, who will benefit from it. In the face of all the evidence, there is incredulity among our people at the Prime Minister's claim that it is so good under the Tories.

The Tories are split over Europe and that reflects the split in United Kingdom businesses over whether to go with the European capitalists or with the United States. Both choices would represent a narrowing of our independence and a changed understanding of our role and of our importance. We have diminished from the Great Britain of empire, an idea used by the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), when he was chairman of the Conservative party, and by the Prime Minister during the previous election campaign. In many ways, the Euro argument is phoney. It was the Prime Minister who signed the Single European Act and none of her present concerns was made known then, although they stem from it.

Many of our people do not care which currency is used; they care about getting more of that currency in their pockets. Europe cannot be the narrow, bureaucratic and undemocratic capitalist club of the Twelve. It must encompass all Europe—east as well as west. That will happen anyway as Germany moves closer to an alliance with Russia in both their interests.

Capitalism and recession in Europe mean unemployment on a huge scale, the division and instability that flow from it, and war. That is why free-market Thatcherism will not work in Europe—as it does not work now in this country. The future of Europe will be democratic socialist.

Meanwhile, debt ravages more and more of the world, and the Gulf crisis and recession will make that worse. There will be unnecessary loss of life, environmental disaster, human underdevelopment and war, promoted by the arms trade and principally promoted by the United States and the United Kingdom, the biggest arms dealers. Increasing numbers of refugees come to this country, to the rest of Europe and to the industrialised world as a consequence of that abysmal policy. The Government have caused the increased number of refugees, but they will not pick up the problem.

Curbing the arms trade should have been included in the Queen's Speech. We have sold about 10,000 chemical protection kits—and to which country? To Iraq. The Iraqis can now feel free to use their chemical weapons against us. British companies, with the support of the Government, have attended arms fairs in Baghdad to sell weapons. We even sold Iraq some of our desert uniforms, so we now have only jungle green uniforms—a wonderful camouflage in the desert.

In an answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), the Minister of State for Defence Procurement talked about the role of the Defence Export Services Organisation and of International Military Services Ltd. The Minister pointed out that the role of DESO was

"to assist the British defence industry in selling its products in overseas markets . . . International Military Services Ltd. is a private limited company . . . whose shares are vested in the Secretary of State for Defence. It offers, on a commercial basis, a range of marketing and project management services in the defence field available to both Government and industry."—[*Official Report*, 30 April 1990; Vol. 171, c. *428*.]

That is the arms trade in which the Government are involved.

We should be adopting proposals such as those put forward by CND for controlling arms sales and curbing the spread of missile technology:

"The Government should set up a register of arms sales . . . The DTI, MoD and FCO should set up a specialist unit to investigate 'dual-use' exports and screen suspect orders . . . The MTCR"—

the Missile Technology Control Regime—

"should be tightened to include shorter range missiles and lighter payloads than at present . . . An independent international MTCR enforcement and verification agency should be set up . . . Cessation of all missile proliferation within the MTCR. Cessation of joint missile projects like the Anglo-French 'Eurodynamics' company set up to research a new air launched nuclear missile . . . All missile producers should be encouraged to join the MTCR through incentives and penalties."

All that should have been in the Queen's Speech.

The Prime Minister has made it clear that she is using war in the Gulf as a political tool. The last paragraph in her speech on the Loyal Address must be seen in the context of the leadership challenge to her, and her current electoral position. Its placing at the end of the speech was bellicose and cynical: she is prepared to use force to reverse the electoral trends running against her. Of course, we must make distinctions—in regard to, for instance, the use of force under the auspices of the United Nations. Whether or not such force is exercised by the United States—the main protagonist—the moral position is against any force being used, because it would be a colonialist measure to protect oil for the use of the capitalist world. My

[Mr. Harry Cohen]

position is clear: I oppose a first-strike policy. We should let sanctions work, and, at the very least, stick with the United Nations.

Neither a cynical war nor bluff can save the Tories. They are split, and their policies are a shambles. As Harold Wilson said, they could not manage a vinegar bottle stall in a chip shop; and, as always, their intentions are malevolent. They wish to maintain wealth, power and privilege for their small elite, and to put everyone else firmly in their place lower down the scale. That has been increasingly understood—but the British people will clear the decks of them at the next election.

9 pm

Mr. Churchill (Davyhulme): The hon. Member for Leyton (Mr. Cohen) will forgive me if I do not follow his remarks—except to say that he is mistaken when he says that desert camouflage is not available to our forces in the Gulf.

Opening the debate, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary outlined the remarkable breakthrough that has been achieved in the CFE negotiations in Vienna which, on the Soviet side, will involve the destruction of some 100,000 major items of conventional military equipment. The scale is dramatic: we are talking about mountains—indeed Everests—of steel. If lined up in a continuous military traffic jam, those 100,000 Soviet tanks, armoured combat vehicles and self-propelled guns would stretch for 600 miles. That is the distance from the Palace of Westminster to the Brandenburg gate in the Berlin wall, which gives us some idea of the scale of what has been achieved.

I pay tribute to the part played by the British Government, our American allies and, indeed, President Gorbachev in achieving the most dramatic breakthrough in arms control for the past 40 years. Once carried into effect, those reductions will effectively remove any imminent conventional military threat to western Europe from the Soviet Union.

However, with 16,000 British forces deployed in the Gulf tonight, I should like to address my remarks to that area. Three months have now elapsed since the United States and Britain made their military commitment there. A formidable alliance has been forged—which is evident in the Gulf, where the allied forces now number in excess of 400,000. It is also evident in the United Nations, and—I am glad to say—it is still very evident in this House.

While that build-up has been taking place, the fate of Kuwait and the Kuwaiti people, which has been off our television screens—and therefore out of sight and, for too many people, out of mind—has been horrendous. Thousands of people have been murdered in cold blood. Museums have been looted. Zoo animals have been barbecued. Hospitals have been despoiled, with vital equipment removed from patients in intensive care. Even babies have been turned out of incubators. Meanwhile, the brutal torture and murder of loyal Kuwaitis believed to oppose the invaders has been relentless.

Only yesterday a letter was published in *The Independent*—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to it—from a British citizen in Kuwait, writing under the pseudonym John Smith:

"The treatment of the Kuwaitis by the Iraqis is atrocious and breaks all international laws and conventions. Electrocution, burnings, beatings and the use of chemicals are all part of the Iraqi interrogation techniques. Executions of Kuwaiti civilians occur every day. The Iraqis often take Kuwaitis back to their homes for execution, and before killing them fire shots in the air in order to attract the attention of people living nearby. In this manner, the Iraqis ensure that the executions are witnessed by friends and families of the victims . . .

The outside world calls for a 'peaceful' or 'diplomatic' solution to the crisis. Everyone in Kuwait disagrees and believes a 'military' solution is required. Peaceful and diplomatic efforts, to date, have resulted in hundreds of Kuwaitis being tortured and killed in some of the most horrible ways possible. Many others will be killed before this is resolved. Other nationalities, including British, are dying because of the lack of access to medical facilities and the stress brought on by the Iraqi occupation . . .

Every day that passes brings more deaths, more hardship and more suffering. It does not bring the Iraqi regime any nearer its end. That will have to be brought about by military action."

That is the view of a Briton living in hiding in Kuwait. It is a clear plea for action.

Although I respect the views of those who have called for more time to be allowed for sanctions to work, I disagree with them most strongly. They must face the fact that their policy will impose mass starvation on the civilian population of Iraq. Are they prepared to support such a policy? When it comes to it, I doubt it. They must also face up to the terrible price being paid by the Kuwaiti people, and by the British and other foreigners in Kuwait, as each day goes by.

If the allies fail to take decisive action to resolve this crisis, it will prove to be another Suez, but with infinitely more dire consequences, given that Iraq's possession of chemical and biological weapons and its imminent acquisition of nuclear weapons will be undisturbed.

Wild statements have been made in the United States and indeed in yesterday's debate in the Chamber about the scale of allied casualties that may be expected in the event of war. The right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) said yesterday that the French Defence Minister, Monsieur Chevenement—incidentally, he is also chairman of the Franco-Iraqi friendship group in the Assemblée Nationale—was forecasting "100,000 dead". Not to be outdone, the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) announced, without quoting any authority, that 500,000 body-bags had been sent to British and American forces in the Gulf. Those are nothing but absurd assertions and reckless guesstimates, based on nothing. I suspect that the reality will prove to be much nearer hundreds than thousands of dead.

Any conflict will be resolved first and foremost in the air. Indeed, the first 180 minutes are likely to prove decisive, as they were in 1967 when the Israeli air force destroyed 300 out of 340 Egyptian aircraft at 19 bases in the first three hours. The United States and Britain have deployed air assets in the Gulf that are fully capable of destroying the Iraqi air force, the offensive missiles that Saddam Hussein has deployed and weapons of mass destruction, in a similar time frame.

As a war correspondent before entering this House, I had occasion to fly low over the Sinai desert and the Golan Heights after both the 1967 and 1973 conflicts. I saw with my own eyes the fate of an army in the desert that loses its air cover. The scene was one of pure devastation, with hundreds upon hundreds of burnt-out tanks, armoured personnel carriers and self-propelled guns, stretching as far as the eye could see. Many of the tank crews had not

waited to be hit, having witnessed the fate of others around them; they had opened their lids and hoofed it across the desert.

I trust that any attack that might take place will be conceived first and foremost to secure a decisive victory but also to keep allied and civilian casualities to an absolute minimum. Let no one in London, Washington or Baghdad doubt the capabilities or resolve of our armed forces to defeat Iraq, to destroy Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction and to liberate the people of Kuwait. Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister indicated that the hour of action may not be far away. That being so, may our forces know as they prepare to go into battle that they go with a heartfelt godspeed from this House.

9.10 pm

Mr. Edwina Currie (Derbyshire, South): We hold this debate on the eve of a most important anniversary. Exactly a year ago, the crowds massed in Berlin, and within hours, on 9 November 1989, they had torn down the Berlin wall —that terrible monument to communism. I wish the new nation well. We have nothing to fear from a united Germany which is now so securely democratic and prosperous. If the Germans are economically competent and competitive, so are we. I and my constituents in Derbyshire, whether they work for Rolls-Royce or Toyota, have no doubt that we can show the Germans a clean pair of heels.

The debate on Europe is now heard more loudly than for many years, and that is good. As a democrat, I try to find out what my constituents and the people of this country want. I examined with some care the MORI opinion poll survey results which were published in *The Sunday Times* last weekend. That is a remarkable survey, because the same questions have been asked of the British people for 17 years, so it is possible to trace the pattern of opinion.

The survey asked how people would vote if there was a referendum on whether Britain should stay in Europe or get out. In 1980, 26 per cent. would have voted to stay in and 65 per cent. would have voted to get out. The "No" vote has fallen to 28 per cent. and the "Yes" vote is 62 per cent. In other words, the position has reversed over 10 years. The "Yes" vote is 2:1 in favour. So much for the notion that this Government have led people to be anti-European. The opposite is the case.

The MORI poll also asked whether people thought Britain's membership of the European Community was a good thing. In 1973 when we first joined, fewer than one person in three—only 31 per cent.—thought that it was a good thing, and 34 per cent. thought that it was a bad thing. In November 1990, we have the highest approval rate ever for Europe at 49 per cent., with only one person in five saying that it is a bad thing.

There are some curious patterns there. Clearly a large number of the British people would vote to stay in the European Community even though they do not believe that it is a good thing. Only the British could be sufficiently polite to vote for something that they do not like. Despite the fact that we have been in the Community for nearly two decades, and despite the highest ever approval ratings, fewer than half our people—only 49 per cent.—believe that our membership of the European Community is a good thing.

There is a lesson there for colleagues on both sides of the House, for those who support Europe, for the Commissioners and for the CBI. They have not yet carried with them the majority of the British people. If they want to make progress they have some convincing to do. They should not take for granted the support of this nation. If we want the kingdom to go forward with more enthusiasm, we must argue the case in favour of Europe and demonstrate the good that comes to our country from Europe more effectively than we are doing at the moment.

There is also an age difference. It is very marked in these polls, and it has been referred to once or twice already. Overwhelmingly, young people are in favour and older people are not so sure. For example, 58 per cent. of those under 25 think that our membership of the European Community is a good thing, compared with only 37 per cent. of those aged 65 and older. I suppose that our older generation remember a time when we had an empire and we marched into Europe—Europe, of course, was somewhere else; we were not Europeans in those days—and sorted them out and then left them to get on with their lives, and it was nothing whatever to do with Britain from then on. The middle-aged—my generation, perhaps—were the traders and the travellers who voted to join the Common Market and want to see barriers to trade reduced, but are hesitant about anything more dramatic, such as political union.

The generation of the under-25s do not remember those times. They do not remember when we were not in Europe. They tell pollsters also that they are content with the European passport, that they are relaxed about the ecu, whether or not it means the end of sterling as a separate local currency. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said:

"there could be no question of giving up our pound sterling unless and until Parliament and people at that time so decide. This Parliament should not pre-empt a choice that should be for future Parliaments and future generations to make."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 31.]

That is absolutely right, and I am sure that even the Labour party could agree with that, but the future generations are already with us and the timetable for those decisions is almost certainly much quicker than the 40 to 50 years that were mentioned in the debate last week. I suspect that we will take those decisions within the next 10 years.

We should not underestimate the emotional drive in Europe, not just in Germany and France. We heard it recently in this Palace of Westminster from President Cossiga of Italy on his state visit as well—the drive towards a united Europe, a drive which sees the change completed in time for the millennium in the year 2000.

However, there is not much comfort for Labour Members. Here they are dancing ahead in the polls, so MORI asked people which party they thought had the best policy on Britain's relations with our European partners, and only one voter in four said, "The Labour party." We Tories did best—not much better, but we certainly did best. Only one voter in 17 supports the Liberal Democrats' approval of everything that comes out of Europe, so we can leave them out of the count.

Barely half of Labour's own supporters approve their own party's stance on Europe, and one Labour voter in nine thinks that the Tories have the best policies in Europe. So not only do the Eurocrats have a job to do in convincing the British people of the virtues of being in

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Europe; the Labour party's hacks have some convincing to do of their own supporters that they have the best policies on Europe.

That is not surprising when we read carefully what the Labour party has said, some of which was read into the record by the hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). We find that the only clear policy that Labour has on Europe is a proposal to transfer certain powers from this House to the European Parliament and that is the only proposal on Europe that the British people are dead against—all generations, all voters, and all groups in all parts of the country. That is the only thing that the Labour party has and the British voters are against.

My own worry is that there has been too much emphasis on "What is Europe doing for us, the British?" and on what Britain is getting out of it. I am quite certain that we have to be in. There is nowhere else for Britain to go. It is a very cold world outside. If one were to think about the Commonwealth, for example, being a group of equal partners, one has only to come with me to Bangladesh on the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association visit soon and see how unlikely that is.

I should like us to see what we can do for Europe, to paraphrase John Kennedy's inaugural speech in 1960. We have a huge part to play in the creation of a free, democratic and prosperous continent. I am all for freedom of trade, but we will not get it unless Britain keeps nagging about subsidies and invisible barriers to trade. Every time we have nagged, our partners have huffed and puffed about it, been rude about the Prime Minister and then given in, as they did again this week.

I am against bureaucracy wherever it is found, whether it is in Whitehall, in Derbyshire county council at Matlock, in Brussels, in Strasbourg, in Geneva or wherever. We can show the people of the rest of Europe how to govern without excessive state interference and without taxing people to the hilt. We have a much clearer idea about what government is and is not for and about when Governments should leave people to make their own decisions.

For those reasons, I feel that our role in the European Community should be positive. That does not mean that we should agree with everything or that we should swallow all the tripe that comes out of the Commission as if it were gospel. It means that the future of Britain inside that strong community of nations is a rosy future, and I, for one, am content with that.

9.19 pm

Sir Michael Marshall (Arundel): Next week, the hon. Member for Don Valley (Mr. Redmond) and I leave for Libya. That begins part of a process of Inter-Parliamentary Union fact-finding missions which, over succeeding weeks, will involve hon. Members of all parties in visits to Syria, Turkey, Jordan, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the Yemen. The visits are designed to establish three things. The first is to explore the attitudes of those who seemingly are supporters of our position on the question of Iraq's withdrawal from Kuwait, but who oppose the presence of western forces. It must be part of our mission to ask those countries exactly what is their own argument and how they will seek to enforce the United Nations resolutions.

Secondly, we wish to express solidarity for those who are part of the 25 nations that are joined in making a contribution in the Gulf. Thirdly—this is most important—we should recognise the sensitivity of, and the need for understanding towards, some of the countries that have special problems in this situation, such as Jordan. If I had more time, I would expand on that point.

However, in the context of the Gulf, I should like to deal with one or two other bilateral relations and it may surprise hon. Members if I turn first to Argentina. It should be recognised that Argentina is part of the community of nations that is committed to joint action in the Gulf. Like other hon. Members, I recently visited Argentina, and should like to remind the House that no fewer than 2 million Argentines are of Arab extraction, led by their president. We welcome the fact that Argentina is playing this role in the new world order, and that should be part of the recognition we accord in the trade and investment talks in the week beginning 26 November, when the Argentine Foreign Minister is to visit this country. That trade and investment agreement will be significant in opening up all kinds of opportunities.

Those of us who recently visited the province of Misiones know that the opportunities for British trade and investment and for two-way trade should lead us to urge caution upon all those with influence in these matters. In our fisheries negotiations, while recognising the sensitivities of the Falklands, this country and Argentina, we should also recognise that those trade and investment agreements are crucial confidence-building measures which I hope will lead us to a more fruitful understanding of the relationship between our countries.

In the brief time available to me, I turn next to central and eastern Europe, to which part of the activities of the Inter-Parliamentary Union have traditionally been directed but have, to some extent, now been put on the back burner. I urge my right hon. Friends to think of what might be done to assist not only Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia, but other areas in special need, such as Romania.

Many hon. Members will also have received a desperate appeal from Bulgaria. I talked today to the Bulgarian chargé d'affaires, and wish to place on record the appalling situation in that country. Its cries from the heart should make us think again about the need for Governments, the voluntary agencies and the United Nations to think about disaster relief in new ways, and not just in the traditional third-world terms.

I conclude by regretting that I shall not have a chance to develop my argument about the importance of the work to which hon. Members of all parties are committed in connection with the forthcoming visit of the Chinese Speaker, Mr. Wan Li, the week after next. That will be an important stage in beginning a new dialogue with China, which can not only cover trade and investment, science and technology, and the environment, but in which the question of Hong Kong will be critical. It is an opportunity to reach a joint affirmation of our commitment to secure the future of that colony. I know that the whole House is engaged with those matters. I commend those who are assisting in that process and look for further support from those right hon. and hon. Members who are present.

9.23 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Clackmannan): Today's debate has focused primarily on Europe and the Gulf. It has had a topical nature few recent Gracious Speech foreign affairs and defence debates have had. The fact that it is in what might be regarded as prime time rather than tucked away on a Friday is evidence of the significance that the House attaches to the subject this year. However, in some respects it is unfortunate that we did not have the debate tomorrow because, as the hon. Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) said, it is the anniversary of an event that has transformed so much of our thinking in the past 12 months.

In some respects European issues have been diminished by our understandable preoccupation with the Gulf. Speaker after speaker this evening divided their remarks into two sections—first Europe and secondly the Gulf. Certainly there is a fair degree of consensus on the Gulf crisis, although there are some areas of division. Some hon. Members foresee the need to use arms earlier than others. Some would argue that we should delay, perhaps indefinitely, and others among us take the view that military action will come and that when it does we will have to use the force of arms with care but with some regret because we sought a peaceful solution.

When the crisis emerged the Labour party called for an economic embargo and applauded its creation. We advocated naval and military deployment and we shall continue to support it. If additional deployment is deemed appropriate to sustain that presence the Labour party will look sympathetically at what forces commanders deem necessary. We have all marvelled at the vigour and strength of the United Nations in responding to the threat to peace in the Gulf.

The Opposition believe that there is still time for sanctions to work and that the liberation of Kuwait and the freeing of hostages may be achieved by means other than the force of arms. Indeed, it is ironic that several Conservative Members said that they did not want to sustain sanctions because they might work and inflict the damage that everyone recognises was the case for introducing them in the first place. If those hon. Members believe that the suffering of folk in Iraq is less appropriate than the carnage that would ensue from force of arms, they should stop and think about the troops being massed on both sides of the border and the damage that could be inflicted not just to the buildings and infrastructure of Iraq and, indeed, that which remains in Kuwait. We must bear in mind the nature of what war in the raw will create. The hon. Member for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill), who graphically related his experiences as a war correspondent, demonstrated that danger. We still have time.

We have heard imaginative speeches from hon. Members on both sides of the House this evening. In particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) gave an interesting prescription. The House will want to read his speech in *Hansard* tomorrow because it was detailed. It showed that people are giving thought to diplomatic options. But all the signs are that there is little likelihood of the Iraqi authorities expressing any interest in a negotiated settlement.

It is fair to say that if we realise our objectives by peaceful means but do not at the same time secure either the dismantling by treaty or the destruction by force of arms of Iraq's nuclear and chemical capabilities, any solution that we achieve will be a pyrrhic one. The long-term security of not only the Gulf but the middle east will be guaranteed only if a degree of legitimacy is afforded to the settlement. That meets the point that we must carry the other Arab and Muslim states with us. If we cannot achieve that consensus, what is the chance of our being able to require Israel to look at its nuclear capability? We cannot require some countries to give up their capabilities if others in the region will not. I am not arguing for linkage. This will be a staged resolution. It will not happen simultaneously. It will not be achieved by a process of diplomatic mirrors. There will be a lengthy, tortuous period of negotiation after what may be an overlong period of war.

We must remember that we need to sustain the consensus. It has been a unique feature of the past nine weeks. The American presence and the Soviet acquiescence are not necessarily inseparable, but without one, the other is meaningless and, if not meaningless, it is profoundly dangerous.

Tonight's debate has focused largely on the Gulf. We have not given as much attention to "Options for Change" as we perhaps should have done. Operation Granby, as the Ministry of Defence calls it, is preoccupying many people. I hope that at a later stage we can consider the MOD response to the Defence Select Committee's report on recent events in Europe. There is much of it that many of us would like to consider.

The references in the Gracious Speech to further negotiations in Europe should enable all of Europe to obtain greater cuts in the form of verifiable measures. If we delay following on the success of the first round of CFE negotiations, we could end up with reciprocal unilateralism—the tit-for-tat disarmament which, although welcome, falls way short of agreements that can be subject to guarantees of inspection and verification. Those security problems are both in Europe and out of area.

Some argue for a European out-of-area role. The prospect of fulfilling such a role without United States participation is hard to imagine. The constructive role played by the Soviet Union in recent months shows its willingness to be involved. Europe cannot afford to alienate either of those great powers because the consequence of isolation from either one or the other is all too evident to and easily understood by those who have read our recent history.

Some say that we do not need to worry ourselves about that and that we need only build up talks on the security dimension for the European Community. We in the Labour party approach that with great caution. Existing NATO members, such as France, have only a semi-detached relationship with NATO's military structure. Germany is prohibited by its constitution from participating outside the NATO area and any prospects of change in the constitution will be confined to United Nations matters, assuming that those constitutional changes can be made.

Within the European Community, Ireland has maintained its neutrality throughout its period of membership. The Austrian and Swedish applications could be jeopardised if we challenged their long-established view on security. If Sweden and Austria were to be frightened off, the participation of Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland would be long delayed. We

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must recognise that the idea of a European answer to the world's security problems creates problems for traditionally neutral countries and the Soviet Union.

Our objective must be the establishment of a common security system from Vancouver to Vladivostock. Its initial tasks will be to oversee and arbitrate on the inspection and verification procedures established by disarmament treaties, to establish means of resolving territorial and ethnic-based disputes, to seek agreement on future levels of armaments between states and to explore ways of securing joint procurement so that we have a means whereby we can defend ourselves at far lower levels of expenditure than at present. Such work will not be completed in the next 12 months, but it must be started. We all wish our representatives well when they meet in Paris next week. The search for a new security framework for Europe, the United States and the Soviet Union must go on.

Today's debate, which some have called the alphabet soup debate, has almost become a creature of those who remember the meanings of the acronyms. The devotees of an institution tend to argue that it is the one with the answers. I believe that our ambitions should be far more modest. Instead of talking about a new architecture for Europe or thinking in terms of reinforced concrete structures, we should seek what I prefer to think of as a scaffolding that can be assembled, changed and taken down as and when it is appropriate to do so and not become wedded to a simplistic idea.

The Labour party has advocated the mutual dissolution of the Warsaw pact and NATO, but the pact has disintegrated. When Soviet military might stopped backing eastern bloc regimes, the whole thing fell apart. The new Governments have for the most part turned their backs on the old military alliance. It is ironic that they have not shown any marked apprehension about the continued presence of NATO forces in Germany. The size of such forces will be reduced drastically, but there is still a job of organisation and co-ordination for NATO forces on the southern flank, in the North sea and in the Atlantic. The work involved in achieving arms reductions in those areas and the organisation of central Europe gives the lie to those who say that NATO no longer has a function.

NATO uniquely is equipped to participate in the work of the conference on security and co-operation in Europe —not to dominate it or to alienate, but to help fill the gap in the CSCE process by way of bureaucracy. One of the great mistakes that people make is to attribute to the CSCE process properties that it does not have. The fact that it does not have a telephone number is evidence of the absence of any bureaucracy. There are obvious gaps in the chancellories of eastern Europe and the new democracies, and the bulk of the responsibility to find a new structure may fall on NATO members and some neutral states in Scandinavia and elsewhere.

This may be the last Queen's Speech before the next general election. As a result, the legislative programme will not be too heavy. I am told that we are to have 15 Bills this year. Last year we had about 45. There is one major item of legislation from the Ministry of Defence—facilitation of contractor operation of the atomic weapons establishments. There are four establishments—Aldermaston, Burghfield, Cardiff and Foulness—and there have been problems with the management of the operation for a long time. There is difficulty about construction of the A90 facilities.

There have been terrible problems with recruitment and retention in the Aldermaston and Burghfield area. Those plants are in an area of low unemployment where there is a high demand for skilled labour and it is difficult for the Ministry of Defence, with its present salary structure, to attract and retain workers. The Government have tried to meet some of the problems. Management consultants have been introduced to assist with management of the plant —to stop it bleeding to death, as someone said—and to prepare for the contractorisation programme.

As I understand it, the work is being given to a group of managers from Hunting-BRAE Ltd. They have to assist in the short-term management of the plant, and to prepare for contractorisation, which will be going out to tender, so there will be some competition. It seems rather strange that the management consultants who will be preparing the brief will be potential contenders for the contract.

The work force has expressed a number of anxieties, and I know that the Secretary of State was good enough to see them before the announcement of the intention to legislate.

The Opposition which will emerge to contractorisation will be different from the campaigns waged over the dockyards and the royal ordnance factories. The Rosyth dockyard makes the argument for contractorisation, whereas the Devonport dockyard experience makes the argument against.

The unions have expressed a number of concerns, which we shall raise with the Minister on Second Reading. But there have been clear indications from the work force that they do not want to indulge in the trench warfare which was the hallmark of the previous contractorisation of defence establishments. There is a willingness to work on an agency arrangement and to search for compromise, but there is a desire to stay within the civil service. There is also a desire to afford managers the opportunity to try our new forms of operation and to establish a new pay structure, which could operate within an agency arrangement.

I make that point because this establishment is radically different from the dockyards. It is a unique facility and there is no prospect of diversification into other activities. There is a sole client and customer—the Government. The materials used are extremely dangerous and it is feared that profit may not be compatible with safety. Privatisation of this type of activity in the United States has brought about terrible environmental problems and safety difficulties.

As I said earlier, the light legislative load this year may give us opportunities to debate foreign affairs and security matters. We must recognise that the Government have so far failed to respond to the Defence Select Committee's challenges on the failure of forward defence as it is now organised, and its relevance to the alliance, and have failed to identify how we can have a flexible response, without flexibility in the form of the renewal of different weapons systems.

Every hon. Member has referred to the prospect of further fighting in the Gulf—a war which may prove easier to start than to finish. Nevertheless, the Labour party in opposition recognises its responsibilities and will continue to support our troops, the allies and the Government, so long as they are seeking to secure the liberation of Kuwait

and of the hostages, and the establishment of a security system in the middle east. We hope that we shall not have to return to this matter in a future debate on the Queen's Speech because we hope that it will be resolved, but if it is not, we know where our sympathies lie. We believe that the Government and the Opposition are largely of one mind on this issue. However, we repeat that our support, although fulsome of our men and of our needs, is not a blank cheque. As the Opposition, we reserve the right to question, to query and to challenge where appropriate. That should not be seen as anything less than backing for our men, who are ready to do an unpleasant job under some of the most difficult and trying conditions in the world.

9.43 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Tom King): A wide range of subjects has been covered in the debate. In the time left to me, I am afraid that my response will have to be extremely flexible.

I have to disabuse the hon. Member for Clackmannan (Mr. O'Neill). He is more naive about these matters than I had appreciated. He has found only 15 Bills in the Queen's Speech; therefore, he thinks that as we dealt with 45 Bills in the previous Session, this will be a much shorter one. I must remind him that the previous Queen's Speech contained only 15 Bills but that we had no difficulty in expanding that number to 45.

Whatever one may think about the quality of today's debate, it has been much easier to hear the speeches. There is no harm in that. The Government appreciate very much the note upon which the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) opened the debate and the note upon which the hon. Member for Clackmannan ended it. We appreciate the support of Her Majesty's Opposition at a time of great national difficulty when our forces and our people, many of them detained against their will, above all look for that united voice.

The few passing criticisms that I shall make are not intended to detract from the deep thought that has been given to these matters. Occasionally the right hon. Member for Gorton criticises the Government for what he disapproves of, but when he approves of what we do he says that it was his idea in the first place and that we are merely following his policies. Since we have initiated one or two of those ideas ourselves, we find that a little difficult to take. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will not mind if I say also that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary opened the debate with an absolutely outstanding speech. He spoke genuinely and drew support from both sides of the House.

We are living in a time of tumultuous change and grave challenge. My hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire, South (Mrs. Currie) rightly said that tomorrow will be the first anniversary of the Berlin wall coming down. It is three and a half months since I stood at this Dispatch Box and announced "Options for Change". It is 99 days since Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary referred to that amazing upheaval as nine months of good news and three months of much more sombre and unattractive news.

The right hon. Member for Gorton was uncharacteristically unfair to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary when he criticised what he described as my right hon. Friend's inactivity over South Africa. I thought that that was absolutely incredible. During the past four to six months more has happened than ever before in South Africa to change the awful face of apartheid. As the right hon. Gentleman and the House know perfectly well, the United Kingdom is not only talking to all the parties but is trusted by all the parties. If the negotiations are carried to the successful conclusion that we all hope to see, the United Kingdom may yet have an important role to play. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes), to whose speeches I have listened over many years, knows perfectly well that three weeks ago President de Klerk carried through the repeal of the Separate Amenities Act. Two years ago people would have thought that that was impossible. He says that nothing has happened, but that is unfair.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): But the Government have done nothing.

Mr. King: The right hon. Member for Gorton referred to the speech made in Colorado by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, in which she talked about a European Magna Carta. He said, "That has disappeared, hasn't it? We haven't seen much sign of it." I ask the right hon. Gentleman to contain himself for another 10 days. The conference on security and co-operation in Europe summit is soon to take place. There will be a final document that will include a section on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. At that gathering in Paris there will be 34 nations. Freedom of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of worship and peaceful assembly, freedom of movement and freedom to own property will be enshrined in that document. The initiative was taken by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, yet the right hon. Member for Gorton has the nerve to say that it has disappeared. It will be triumphantly displayed in 10 days' time. I hope that then he will recognise it for what it is.

I appreciated what the right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Clackmannan said about the future of NATO. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made it clear that it is important that NATO should continue. It should not disintegrate into disarray, as is happening with the Warsaw pact. It must evolve and change. We all recognise its importance. The hon. Member for Clackmannan sends me letters saying that we are not spending enough on weapons or that we may not be placing some contract for tanks or frigates. The Opposition enjoy this activity. The right hon. Member for Gorton said that the next Labour Government will play an active and constructive role in NATO. What with? What are they going to use when the Labour party conference resolutions will slash their defence expenditure? I say in the kindest way, there are many pious words but there is little to back them up.

The hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone (Mr. Maginnis) referred to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. He said that he would read what I have to say so I shall say something so that he can read it. I say to him and his hon. Friends that there are different views about whether the Irish Government could or should do more in different ways to improve security and whether they could improve their co-operation with Great Britain and Northern Ireland. However, anybody who believes that we are likely to do better in tackling the real problems in Northern

[Mr. King]

Ireland without trying to work in harmony and understanding with the Republic of Ireland is living in total ignorance of the real circumstances.

It is sad that people of ability and courage such as the hon. Member for Fermanagh and South Tyrone continue to bash their heads against the same old brick walls instead of starting to do something more positive and constructive.

This incredible year will be marked by the signing of the conventional forces in Europe treaty at the CSCE conference in 10 days. The year has passed so quickly that many of its events have been overtaken by subsequent developments. I remember the shiver that went through London in February when the news came through that the Americans were thinking of doing a separate deal on manpower numbers and that they were going to come down to 195,000 on the central front and 30,000 outside. People wondered whether it was wise or dangerous. We have gone way beyond that now. The question now is whether the number will be in six figures.

The most recent development on 12 September was the treaty on final settlement with respect to Germany. What an amazing title that is. It was marked by the departure of the British commandant from Berlin. We are no longer part of the four-power arrangement. We now see the unified Germany as a full member of NATO. The final settlement also agrees the total withdrawal of Soviet troops by the end of 1994.

I have been in Hungary and Czechoslovakia and the Polish Vice Minister of Defence has been here this week. They are all desperate for closer contact with the west. We see the Warsaw pact dissolving before our eyes. My hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) referred to the break-up of the Soviet Union.

There was a startling and interesting intervention from the hon. Member for Inverness, Nairn and Lochaber (Sir R. Johnston). It is extraordinary to talk now about access for the Baltic states to the CSCE. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has been talking to the Estonian Foreign Minister. All that underlines the extraordinary changes that we are seeing. They have great implications for us. I have talked about the NATO strategy and "Options for Change". There will be reductions. The House heard my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer today and will have had a chance to study the figures. They will gradually gather momentum and we shall be able to achieve savings through rationalisation and some reductions in our armed forces, particularly in Germany where we shall see significantly lower force levels, in not only the front line but the support areas. Hon. Members will appreciate that those reductions will mean pain and the loss of jobs in some industries that are used to defence equipment orders. They will perhaps mean changes in some bases, but everybody understands that that is an inevitable consequence.

We must obviously maintain adequate defences. I spoke in my statement on "Options for Change" of the threat of the unexpected and of the need for flexibility and mobility. I did not know that within eight days the need would be so clearly demonstrated. As I speak tonight, we have some 17,000 men and women committed to the Gulf from the Army, Navy and Air Force. The move of the 7th armoured brigade involved 40 ships, 4,200 vehicles and 40,000 tonnes of ammunition and stores. It was an amazing achievement. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry to hear the right hon. Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Healey) criticise it. It was an amazing logistical achievement. I am going to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf on Sunday. I look forward with much interest to seeing everything that I have heard about the excellent morale, the good performance of the equipment and the work that has been done.

Important issues are still to be tackled. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East spoke of the integration of command and control. I am satisfied with our arrangements, but he rightly referred to the 28 or so countries that are involved, some of which are involved only at sea, but a significant number are involved on land. It is important to ensure proper command and control arrangements.

It is also important to ensure the welfare of our people in the Gulf. I do not want to go into detail about the issues of free mail arrangements, better telephone arrangements, rest and relaxation and entertainment, to which we attach importance.

We see ourselves as part of a force of 28 or so countries, of which Czechoslovakia was the last to make a contribution. Some of the work has been done under the auspices of the WEU to develop the European pillar to which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs referred.

President Bush has announced that he is sending further substantial reinforcements to the Gulf. I spoke this evening to Secretary Cheney, who confirmed that although they are substantial reinforcements of additional heavy divisions that will provide an adequate offensive military option, they mark no change in United States policy because it still seeks to resolve this difficult conflict by peaceful means.

My hon. Friends the Members for Bristol, East (Mr. Sayeed), for Davyhulme (Mr. Churchill) and for Southampton, Test (Mr. Hill), the hon. Members for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and for Middlesbrough (Mr. Bell) and the right hon. Member for Leeds, East exercised their minds, as we do constantly on these difficult issues, about how to ensure that the aggression and the awfulness of what is happening in Kuwait is ended at the earliest possible moment by peaceful means. It must be done by the most effective application of the embargo and the ruthless application of the sanctions regime, backed up by a credible military option. It must be backed up by the reality that if peaceful means are not achieved, force will be used.

We are conscious that in the modern world of communications, with Cable News Network and other channels, everything that we say is listened to, perhaps more in Baghdad than anywhere else. We must be careful what we say. The right hon. Member for Leeds, East is a distinguished former Secretary of State and has held two major offices of state, but listening to his speech I wondered—I think that my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) said this—what impact it would have had in Baghdad. We must choose our words carefully.

What my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said, and the way in which she put it, is more likely to settle this by peaceful means without conflict because, from her words, there will be no question but that there is a military option which, if the aggression is not ended, will be used.

Mr. Healey: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. King: I am sorry, but I shall not give way. I am saying this in the kindest possible way. I should like to quote the words of someone from Kuwait to whom the right hon. Gentleman referred. I do not know whether the House knows that "John Smith" who wrote from Kuwait also wrote to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and said:

"I belong to no political party and have never voted for the Conservative Party. Nevertheless I am sending you a copy of my recent article as I think that you have most accurately represented the feelings of British civilians caught up in the situation, and I would ask you to continue with the views and opinions that you have expressed."

We want the situation settled by peaceful means. We are determined to see the aggression end. We are determined to see that one way or another Saddam Hussein will go. If he does not go peacefully, he must face the consequences.

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

BROADCASTING, &c.

Ordered,

That Sir Geoffrey Howe be discharged from the Select Committee on Broadcasting, &c., and that Mr. John MacGregor be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

HOUSE OF COMMONS (SERVICES)

Ordered,

That Sir Geoffrey Howe be discharged from the Select Committee on House of Commons (Services), and that Mr. John MacGregor be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

PRIVILEGES

Ordered,

That Sir Geoffrey Howe be discharged from the Select Committee on Privileges, and that Mr. John MacGregor be added to the Committee. —*[Mr. Sackville.]*

Car Crime

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sackville.]*

10 pm

Mr. Greville Janner (Leicester, West): I am delighted to have the opportunity to raise, during the week of the debate in reply to the Queen's Speech, the growing problem of car crime. The stealing of cars, the stealing from cars and joyriding in cars are becoming a plague. It is a danger to the public, including the people who own cars, and often a menace to the people who joyride in them. The problem afflicts the whole country and has special application in my county of Leicestershire, where, unfortunately, in the first part of 1990 the number of these offences increased by nearly 50 per cent. What is more, nearly half those offences are known to have been committed by lads aged between 13 and 17.

This morning, I went to two schools in my constituency in Beaumont Leys, which is comparatively new and includes a series of estates where a tremendous number of good citizens live. It is also an area in which crime of this kind has been growing enormously. I talked to and listened to the children at Buswells Lodge and Barleycroft schools. I was told that, during the past year or so, 38 of the 50 families of the children in one class at Barleycroft school suffered from the theft of a car or motor cycle at their homes or outside them. The children told me what happens to those vehicles. Sometimes they are dumped in a field. Sometimes they never reappear. Sometimes the joyriders set them alight—on one occasion, they drove a car into a school car park and set it alight.

This picture of car crime has spread throughout the country. It is scarcely recognised and is certainly not dealt with. It is, of course, part of a much wider picture of crime which is growing more than ever before. We have a picture of violent crimes against the person, of burglary, of robbery and of constituents—old and sometimes young—afraid to go out at night for fear of attack. Some of them are even afraid to stay in at night for fear of attack.

When we bring this to the Government's attention, the result is always the same. There are statistics to show that, theoretically, more money has been spent on the fight against crime. However, that is a wholly inadequate admission of the extent to which the plague of crime in general, and of car crime in particular, has afflicted our society. Successive chief constables of Leicestershire have begged for an adequate number of policemen on the beat and for more resources so that they can increase the number of police who are visible and available. That would mean that there was less temptation to crime, because there would be a greater chance of criminals being caught.

However, time after time the Government, who are meant to be a Government of law and order, have replied, "Sorry, we cannot afford it." We cannot afford the level of crime that has been reached, we cannot afford the misery that it has caused and we certainly cannot afford the high cost that this country has to bear as a result of car crime.

It has been estimated that car theft costs Britain approximately £1 billion a year, with car-related crime now accounting for more than one quarter of all reported crime. For the year ending June 1990, thefts from vehicles have increased by 13·1 per cent. and thefts of vehicles have increased by 20·6 per cent. Crime overall went up by 12·6

[Mr. Greville Janner]

per cent. over the same period. It is true that statistics on crime, like all other statistics, have to be treated with a certain amount of caution. However, while more crimes are being reported, many are still not reported. It is estimated that, of thefts from cars, only 30 per cent. reach the statistics.

Crime is increasing and the clear-up rate for theft remains low. The figure for thefts from vehicles is 23 per cent. and for thefts of vehicles it is 27 per cent. In Leicestershire, thefts of vehicles and joy riding increased by 25 per cent. in 1989 and, I repeat, in the first half of 1990, car thefts and joy riding jumped by 47·3 per cent. Up to September of this year, car crime represented 44·2 per cent. of all reported crime. Over the past 10 years in Leicestershire, thefts of cars increased by 79 per cent. and theft from cars increased by 223 per cent.—a massive and wholly unacceptable increase.

That increase affects everyone who owns a car, a motorcycle or a van, but there is also danger to the youngsters who commit the crimes. On 16 April this year, for example, a Leicester couple who had six children were killed by a 16-year-old joyrider. Not only did the man and woman suffer, but the joyrider and his 16-year-old passenger were killed. Four people died in the same joyriding accident.

How are we to deal with such crime? We must recognise the facts and what is being stolen. In the past, most stolen cars were Fords and small cars. Small cars were mainly involved because many of the youngsters who stole them could not steal big cars because their feet could not reach the pedals. Now that has changed, and they have learnt to move the seats—and there are bigger cars. I have been told by the police, both nationally and locally, that the move is away from the ordinary car to the souped-up vehicle—the more powerful car, which is more dangerous when on the road. It is dangerous to others and to the individual, but it is a car that is regarded as more fun to drive.

We look for some response to the problem. What do we find? In 1988, a Home Office working group on car crime outlined four broad areas for action. It wanted

"further study of potential solutions."

That has got nowhere. It also wanted

"improved statistics."

Perhaps the statistics are a little better, but they have not brought any joy.

Another requirement was

"programmes to divert youth from taking up car crime."

That is extremely important. Earlier this evening, I was fortunate enough to have a conversation with Sir John Dellow, deputy chief commissioner of the Metropolitan police. Let me pause to say how much I—along with all hon. Members I am sure—regret the illness that has been suffered by Sir Peter Imbert, the commissioner, and how glad we are that he is making such excellent progress. We all hope that he will be back at his post very soon.

I talked to Sir John about this debate. It is not an easy task to say to a leading police officer "What can you do?" He told me, for instance, about some initiatives that he and fellow officers had been pursuing in various parts of London: they have been setting up operations separate from normal police work. In those operations, youngsters who are besotted with cars and want to learn to drive—and to take cars apart and put them together again—are encouraged and helped to do so. The schemes are flourishing, and they are certainly worthy of compliment.

This morning I was taken to Boswells Lodge and Barleycroft schools by a police community officer, PC Parker. He is working with the youngsters and their families to try to change the atmosphere. However, it is a difficult task, because the position of ordinary folk is becoming more difficult. Disadvantage is growing, and resources are fewer. When local authorities' resources are cut, everyone suffers. In this case, it is the youth service, the youth clubs and the places where youngsters can be helped to make the best of their talents, and kept away from the temptations of joyriding and theft. Given the cuts, it is difficult for local authorities to create alternative programmes to divert youth from taking up car crime.

Finally, the Home Office working group recommended "design improvements in car security by manufacturers." I raised this matter with Ford, because so many of its cars were being stolen as a result of inadequate security arrangements. I am glad to say that it is aware of that and is taking the appropriate steps.

However, the sad fact is that it is impossible to prevent people from stealing a vehicle if they are sufficiently determined. They can smash the window and get in, and then attach wires to bypass the ignition. Members of the public, however, must make it more difficult for car thieves. We must try to deter people by locking up cars —if possible, in a garage—and by ensuring that they are locked in the street. We should use visible and invisible devices to immobilise cars in the hope that they will not be stolen. Of course, the thieves may go off and steal someone else's car, so that is only a start, but, if it gets hard enough for the thief, with a bit of luck the deterrent will work.

Meanwhile, it is fair to ask the Government—as one would any Government—whether they have recognised the growth of car crime. Do the Government know about the serious problems that this type of crime is creating? Do they recognise that the people who are creating the problem tend to be young men or boys who can find no other recreation that they will enjoy?

I have outlined the problem. I want to pay tribute to my assistants, David Ramsden, Brian Silver, and Michael Fertleman, who have been kind enough to help me with this brief. I wish that I had had more help from the Government with finding ways to deal with the problems which, for my constituents and for many people throughout the country, give rise to alarm. Car crime is a plague of misery that requires immediate and active attention.

10.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): I am very pleased to have this opportunity to respond to the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner) who has raised an extremely important matter—car crime, thefts of and from cars—which, despite what he said, is of major concern to the Government.

Recent increases in the numbers of these offences have been disappointing and worrying. The hon. and learned Gentleman is right: they are particularly marked in the county of Leicestershire. The House will have been as impressed as I was by the graphic accounts that the hon. and learned Gentleman heard from the children that he met recently, but I am sorry that he sought to suggest that

the Government do not recognise the problem. They most certainly do, and I hope that my remarks will convince the hon. and learned Gentleman of that.

Car crimes account for more than a quarter of all recorded crime; of that the Government are well aware. They cause great inconvenience to the motoring public and they impose costs on everyone due to the police time taken up in dealing with them, the cost of taking offenders through the criminal justice system and the higher insurance premiums.

Stolen cars are also a real danger on our roads. The driver of a stolen car is all too often involved in an accident, with tragic consequences for himself and innocent road users. The hon. and learned Gentleman gave a particularly horrific example from his knowledge. So what must be done to counter this menace? First, the Government must ensure that there are adequate numbers of police officers to help prevent and detect crime. There are now more than 127,000 police officers—an increase of more than 15,000 since 1979. To release more police officers for operational duties, we have provided an additional 10,000 civilian staff, of whom there are now more than 45,000.

The hon. and learned Gentleman complained that calls for more police officers in Leicester had fallen on deaf ears——

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): It is true.

Mr. Lloyd: In fact, the figures contradict him. There are 68 more police officers in Leicester now than in 1979, so there are most certainly more. Secondly, 130 police officers have been redeployed to active policing thanks to the civilianisation programme. Last year alone, 27 more posts were given to the Leicestershire police force. I know that it has asked for additional posts for this year; they are being considered by the Home Secretary at this very moment.

The Government must also ensure that the courts have adequate powers to deal with those who steal cars or steal from cars. As the hon. and learned Gentleman will know, the maximum penalty for theft of or from a vehicle is, and will continue to be under the proposals set out in the criminal justice White Paper, a long period of imprisonment. The penalty for taking a vehicle without authority is a fine of £2,000 or six month' imprisonment, or both. We are therefore fully supporting the police in their efforts, and we have ensured that the penalties for car crime are more than adequate.

Action by the Government, by the police and within the criminal justice system, however, is not enough. I agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman about that. We know that the vast majority of thefts of or from cars are committed not by professional thieves but by opportunists who take advantage of an unlocked car or of a wallet or handbag left temptingly on display inside. We know that much car crime is preventable, so it requires action by the whole community. The Government, the police and the courts must play their part, but so too must the car manufacturers, the insurance industry and car owners.

Home Office crime prevention campaigns have quite rightly highlighted the need for car owners to take care to park their cars safely. That campaign seems to have helped to convince the hon. and learned Gentleman that that is an important factor if the number of car crimes is to be reduced. Cars must be locked and valuables removed. Adequate security devices or anti-theft equipment such as security-coded radios should be fitted. That advice is reflected in our crime prevention handbook entitled "Practical Ways to Crack Crime", more than 3 million copies of which have been distributed.

Next year, our publicity campaign will take a new turn, with the holding of Crime Prevention Week 1991. From Monday 15 to Friday 19 April, each day will be assigned a theme which we hope will focus on local crime prevention activity all over the country, backed up by a national television and press advertising campaign. One of those themes is car crime, and that day should provide an excellent opportunity for police crime prevention departments, crime prevention panels and others to demonstrate to the public what can be done to reduce the risk of their cars being stolen or broken into.

Through our publicity campaigns, we have also stressed the need for the public to seek better in-built security when buying a new car. We know from the British crime survey that 64 per cent. of those interviewed would be willing to pay more for a car with comprehensive security and that 40 per cent. of those would be willing to pay up to £250 more. We know that some manufacturers have responded to that demand by providing better security in their cars. We welcome that.

Earlier this year, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary asked the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders for a comprehensive industry view of the steps which are being taken and which are proposed to improve inherent car security. Home Office officials met society representatives today and received their report. We shall be considering that carefully.

To help manufacturers, the British Standards Institution has produced a five-part standard covering mechanical door locks, radio-cassette security, glass marking, central locking: and deadlocking. While it is open to motor manufacturers to adopt the standard voluntarily, a mandatory requirement for all United Kingdom manufacturers to fit security devices to a specified standard would require an amendment to the existing EC directive on vehicle security.

The Department of Transport is engaged in discussions with its counterparts in Europe to have key elements of the British standard incorporated into this EC directive, but there has been, alas, opposition from other EC member states and foreign vehicle manufacturers and, as a result, progress has been slow. We in the Home Office are considering ways in which, with the help of motor manufacturers and consumer organisations, the obstacles to progress may be overcome.

An international crime survey published earlier this year showed that, while the rate of car crime in the United Kingdom compares unfavourably with that of other western European countries included in the survey, car crime is a significant problem in Europe and should be a matter of concern for other European Community member states. I hope that we can look to Europe for support for our initiative in that area.

However, whatever security devices are fitted, there is a need for car owners to make use of them and generally to take better care of their cars. A recent survey found that one car in five was left insecure. It is incredible that while, for most people, the purchase of a car represents their second largest investment, one in five car owners do

[Mr. Lloyd]

not take the basic precautions of locking their car, closing the windows and securing the boot before they leave it.

Of course, the majority of new cars are purchased by business, and we believe that businesses could do more to encourage motor manufacturers to improve inherent car security. An example of what can be achieved there is the local authority in Strathclyde, which demands that its vehicle fleet is fitted with car alarms, and that low-cost radio-cassette players must be fitted to any vehicle from which there have been two previous thefts of radio-cassette players. We understand that that has had a significant and beneficial effect on the fleet's vulnerability.

We were concerned to note the decision, earlier this year, by the British Vehicle Rental and Leasing Association to withhold its annual anti-car theft award because little or no progress had been made by motor manufacturers towards combating car crime. My officials will be discussing with the association tomorrow ways in which it can help with Home Office initiatives against car crime.

The hon. and learned Gentleman knows that the Home Office is also producing a car theft index, which will show which makes and models of cars are particularly prone to theft. We hope that the index will inform manufacturers and car owners about which cars are particularly attractive to the car thief——

Mr. Janner: And potential car buyers.

Mr. Lloyd: Very much so—particularly the car buyer. We also hope that the index will help with the targeting of security measures. We are consulting motor manufacturers and others about the index.

Car crime is, of course, also of the greatest interest to the insurance industry. The Association of British Insurers estimated recently that insurance industry payments for losses on car crime will total £400 million by the end of this year. I know that insurers are anxious to help to reduce the number of car crime offences. I am pleased that the Association of British Insurers plans to revise its vehicle insurance group rating system, which will in the future take account of a car's security features. I am sure that that will help to alert car manufacturers and car buyers to the benefits of good car security.

Finally, I should mention another innovation in the prevention of car crime which is to be welcomed. It is the development of vehicle watch schemes. In the schemes, which are run by police forces, car owners register with the police that their car is not normally used between certain hours, and they are provided with stickers to be fixed to the front and rear windows. If a car bearing the stickers is observed by the police being driven outside the prohibited period, it is liable to be stopped. A recent survey by the Home Office crime prevention centre found that 13 vehicle watch schemes are now in operation, and that a further 10 are proposed.

As the hon. and learned Member for Leicester, West is aware, the Leicestershire constabulary is to launch its vehicle watch scheme on 26 November. I am sure that it will have his support. It is an imaginative initiative, and we look forward to hearing of the development of the schemes.

I hope that what I have said will help to assure the hon. and learned Gentleman, and indeed the whole House, that the Government regard car crime as a very serious problem and that practical and co-ordinated steps are being taken to reduce it. I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for his justified concern on the issue and for giving me the chance of outlining what is being done. It is far more than he was prepared to acknowledge in his opening speech, and I hope that, on reflection, he will recognise that.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 9 November 1990

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

BILL PRESENTED

DISABILITY LIVING ALLOWANCE AND DISABILITY WORKING ALLOWANCE

Mr. Secretary Newton, supported by Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Brooke, Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Secretary Waldegrave, Mr. Francis Maude, Mr. Nicholas Scott and Mrs. Gillian Shephard, presented (under Standing Order No. 48 (Procedure upon Bills whose main object is to create a charge upon the public revenue)) a Bill to introduce as social security benefits disability living allowance and disability working allowance; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the first time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday 12 November and to be printed. [Bill 9.]

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[THIRD DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [7 November],

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, The Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Younger.]*

Question again proposed.

Industry and Transport

Mr. Speaker: Before I propose the Question again, I must tell the House that many hon. Members have sought to take part in today's debate and therefore I propose to put a 10-minute limit on speeches between 11.30 and 1 o'clock. If those who are called before that time are relatively brief, it may be possible to relax it.

9.36 am

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): Although Friday is not the most crowded day in the House, in my experience it is a day when those hon. Members who attend are among the most perspicacious, assiduous and discriminating. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] So Friday debates are occasions for greater frankness and concentration on the key issues than is perhaps possible on some other days of the week.

The Gracious Speech makes it clear that the key issue facing the world economy is the success or failure of the Uruguay round. The world economy is clearly slowing down, and the normal trade cycle is exacerbated by the Gulf crisis and higher oil prices. So what the world needs, above all, is a non-inflationary stimulus, and only a successful GATT round could provide that.

Lower tariffs and the removal of barriers to trade would simultaneously put downward pressure on prices and encourage increased trade and activity. So the failure of the Community to table any offer on agriculture by the agreed date threatened to derail the whole Uruguay round. That would have had incalculable consequences for world prosperity.

We must all feel relieved that Farm and Trade Ministers averted disaster when they finally reached agreement on Tuesday. That outcome owes much to the insistence of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary that Heads of Government should consider the matter at Rome, and to the tenacious insistence in Brussels by my right hon. and hon. Friends the Agriculture and Trade Ministers that the matter be pursued to a successful conclusion.

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I will be able to reduce my speech by at least five minutes if I obtain an adequate response now. What about the

[Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas]

consequences of a 30 per cent. reduction in agricultural incomes? When will the Government make their views known on the consequences of that?

Mr. Lilley: My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has already made it clear that that 30 per cent. is related to the position in 1986 and hence includes many of the changes that have already been made. So the effect on farm incomes is by no means a 30 per cent. reduction in the present level of support. It has also become clear over the years that agricultural support, both in the Community and in other countries, rarely finds its way unltimately into farmers' pockets. It finds its way into the increased costs that farmers incur and they should not fear that a reduction in subsidies will necessarily result in a corresponding reduction in their incomes. However, to some extent it will result in the reduction of their costs, to the great benefit of consumers and agriculture, particularly in this country, which has the most efficient agriculture in Europe.

We have jumped the hurdle of the agreement, in Brussels, but there are plenty more hurdles to jump before we can bring the round to a successful conclusion. Not only our Common Market partners but our friends in north America, the Cairns group, the newly industralised countries and the less developed countries will all have to be ready to compromise.

I have held meetings during the past two or three months with innumerable Trade Ministers. They all recognise Britain's pivotal role in bringing about agreement, first at Punta del Este, then in Brussels and in the remaining negotiations. We have taken that constructive lead, not least because Britain is one of the great trading nations of the world so we stand to gain most from a successful round or lose most, if, heaven forfend, the world sinks back into protectionism, trade wars and beggar-my-neighbour policies.

We are not motivated simply by self-interest. The Government believe passionately in free trade, which is the guarantor of prosperity, binds nations together and is the ultimate foundation stone of peace. Much the same philosophy lies behind the single European market. That is why it is Britain's number one priority on the Community agenda. It was originally a British idea. The programme was drawn up by a British Commissioner, and the vision behind the single market is closely related to the policies that the Government have pursued with success in the United Kingdom.

I am glad to say that the Community is making good progress on the single market front. Some two thirds of the legislative programme is now agreed. Perhaps the most concrete example of how seriously this country takes the single market and European Community commitments generally is its record in implementing single market measures. Our record is better than any of our partners, except Denmark. We shall continue to press our partners to liberalise outstanding sectors such as life assurance and investment services, implement agreed directives and enforce directives that they have already implemented.

In view of the events of the past 12 years, it is perhaps unwise of holders of my office to look too far ahead, but that caveat apart, I confidently look forward to chairing the Internal Market Council when it presides over the successful completion of the single market in the second half of 1992. What is more, I am confident that, when I do so, I shall have the wholehearted backing of the Conservative party for the principles that underlie both the GATT round and the single market.

Those principles are exactly in tune with the Government's belief in open markets, unsubsidised competition and free trade. But those principles are completely alien to the policies and beliefs of the Labour party. I have never heard a Member of the Labour party call for abolishing subsidies, scrapping protection, encouraging competition, freeing markets or liberalising trade. Whereas the Conservative Government have had their foot on the accelerator for GATT and the single market, Labour would be forever applying the brakes.

We have been eager to promote free trade, deregulation and unsubsidised competition in international trade because we have seen its benefits domestically. The simple fact is that during the 1960s, when, to a greater or lesser degree, we pursued policies that the Opposition believe in, the United Kingdom had the slowest growing economy in western Europe. During the 1970s, the United Kingdom still had the slowest growing economy in western Europe. But during the 1980s, thanks to our policies, Britain has been in the vanguard of growth; our output has grown faster than that of France, Italy and Germany.

The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) is always lecturing other people on the dangers of short-termism, but when it comes to economic performance, he is a short-termist of the worst kind. He ignores the long-term performance of a whole decade or the prospects for the decade to come, and focuses on the short-term outlook over the next few months.

Of course, there are short-term issues.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Surely there can be no greater example of short-termism from the Conservative Government than the remit that they gave British Steel to buy cheap and sell dear and stop manufacturing, which yesterday led to 1,200 job losses and the closure of the Clydesdale steel works. Those people who are to be unemployed face not short-term but long-term unemployment.

Mr. Lilley: That is manifest nonsense. British Steel has been put in the hands of the private sector to work for the long-term benefit of this country, its employees and its shareholders. It is not for us to second-guess the commercial decisions it takes. I would be interested to hear from the Labour party whether it proposes to renationalise it, direct its actions and break the European Commission rules that prevent subsidies and intervention or whether it has any policy on the issue. The fact is that it does not.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Secretary of State for Scotland set out the Government's policy towards British Steel in Scotland a few months ago, which was to persuade British Steel to reconsider its decision to close the Ravenscraig strip mill and pressure it with a view to reversing it? Will he name one thing that he has done in the past five months to implement that policy?

Mr. Lilley: I endorse entirely the words and actions of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. He is not going to breach the rules of the Euopean Community. Is the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East going to do so? When the hon. Member

for Dunfermline, East spelt out his five-point plan for Scottish steel, four of its items were contrary to the European Community rules and a fifth was to set up a committee.

I shall return to the short term, which so obsesses the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East. I promise to be frank and consider the problems that we face. The central problem facing the country is inflation. I spend a great deal of time visiting businesses, meeting and talking to business people. Virtually all of them agree that inflation is the supreme enemy. It destroys savings, undermines investment, prevents planning and destroys jobs. Get inflation down, and other problems become far easier to tackle; but to prescribe a cure, we must first understand the cause of the recent resurgence of inflation.

For that, we must look back to the crash in the world capital markets in October 1987, which was unprecedented, except for the crash of 1929, which was followed by the slump of the 1930s. We were determined to prevent a recurrence of that pattern, so we reduced interest rates, relaxed monetary policy and encouraged expansion. With the benefit of hindsight, we acknowledge that that was a mistake.

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): That was before the election.

Mr. Lilley: It was after the election. The hon. Member's sense of time is as mistaken as most of his other ideas.

The economy in 1987 was not, as it seemed, faltering but growing strongly, and the stock market crash was no more than a technical correction. Nineteen eighty-eight, far from being a year of recession, turned out to be the year of strongest growth in nine successive years of growth. We got it wrong, but the Labour party urged us to get it wrong in spades. Some months after the crash in 1987, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) was still urging us to relax even more. He said:

"Now is the time for cuts in interest rates to stimulate the economy . . . Now is the time for a programme of well-planned public investment to mobilise the unused capacity . . . There is no economic constraint on such action."

With the benefit of hindsight, we know that monetary relaxation which we were urged to do in greater measure, triggered strong consumer spending, which, fuelled by mortgage borrowing and a simultaneous boom in investment, meant that there was too much money chasing too few goods. That is the age-old recipe for inflation.

Mr. Gordon Brown: If the Government were wrong to relax interest rates at the beginning of 1989, were they not also wrong to give away £6 billion in tax cuts in the Budget? Is that not one of the major reasons why we face our current problems?

Mr. Lilley: Once again, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong. The Budget to which he refers increased the surplus. In case he does not understand these things, let me explain that, in the 1988 Budget, the Government took out of the economy in taxes £14 billion more than they spent. That represented not a relaxation but the tightest fiscal policy that this country has ever had.

We are now at the most difficult point in the process of getting inflation down. Monetary relaxation triggered inflation and monetary tightness is its cure. Higher interest rates encourage saving and discourage borrowing. That slows spending, which in turn curbs price rises.

I repeat that we are at the most difficult point in the process. Interest rates are still high, although my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has been able to cut them by one point. Demand has begun to slow, and although inflation has not yet responded to weaker demand, it will respond. All outside forecasters agree with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that inflation is set to fall rapidly next year. When inflation falls, my right hon. Friend will be able to reduce interest rates, and non-inflationary growth will resume.

Yesterday, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East disputed that, although, given his track record in forecasting, that fills me with confidence. The House will recall that, in October 1986, the hon. Gentleman wrote in *The Guardian:*

"In 1990 around 3·12 million of us will still be unemployed . . . the Government simply cannot reduce unemployment by present economic policies."

The hon. Gentleman said that that could prove to be an underestimate. In fact, unemployment has fallen in 43 of the subsequent 48 months. In 1984, the hon. Gentleman did even worse, when he told us that there was no evidence that economic recovery was in sight. When he made those remarks, we were already three years into the longest period of sustained economic growth since the war.

Economic policies are more important than economic forecasts. Before the Opposition criticise the present slow-down in demand, they must answer a simple question: do they know of any method of reducing inflation, successfully tried in any country, that does not involve a slow-down in demand? To coin a phrase, the Opposition had better either "put up or shut up".

At a time of slack demand, industry is still chalking up some impressive achievements.

Mr. Prescott: He is a thug.

Mr. Lilley: Coming from the hon. Gentleman, that is a compliment indeed, because he knows something about it.

Manufactured exports in the last quarter were up 8 per cent. on the previous year, whereas imports have not grown during that period. For the second year running, our manufactured goods have increased their share of world markets. That is a tribute to industry's competitiveness. Despite high interest rates, the number of businesses has increased by about 70,000 over the past year, after taking account of closures, mergers and companies ceasing to trade. There are now nearly 400,000 more businesses in Britain than there were when we came to power in 1979. That is a tribute to the climate of enterprise that we have created.

The number of industrial disputes in the past year has been the lowest for 50 years. That is a tribute to our trade union reforms, which the Labour party has opposed so vehemently.

Business investment is at a record level and, even allowing for the cyclical movement predicted by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, investment next year will be 50 per cent. higher than when the Opposition left office. That is a tribute to the vast improvement in industry's profitability under this Government.

Industry is right to take the long-term view and continue to invest in its future because, once the short-term problem of inflation is licked, the prospects for British industry in the 1990s will be even better than in the 1980s.

[Mr. Lilley]

The 1980s saw manufacturing industry improve its productivity faster in Britain than in any other major country—faster even than in Japan. That has set the basis for a substantial expansion of our manufacturing base in the 1990s.

The motor industry is a notable example. Having fallen below 1 million cars a year, output is now set to pass 2 million cars a year during this decade. Three major Japanese firms have chosen to base their European operations here in Britain. Does anyone imagine that they would have come here if Labour had been in power? How splendid it is that Nissan will soon be exporting British-built cars back to Japan. In addition, Rover—back in the private sector—is a company transformed. Its Longbridge plant is now producing more cars than at any time in its history and Jaguar is planning to treble capacity. Vauxhall is exporting from Ellesmere Port for the first time in 15 years. Before too long, Britain should be exporting more cars than it imports.

Other major developments bode well for the future. The completion of the channel tunnel will give an enormous stimulus to trade and travel during the remainder of the decade. It has done that even during its construction. About 75 per cent. of the orders at this end of the tunnel and 50 per cent. overall have been won by British firms. The whole enterprise is one of the most massive engineering achievements ever, and I am sure that the whole House will wish to pay tribute to all those involved in the work culminating in the successful link-up last week.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): What about the work force?

Mr. Lilley: Of course I include the work force.

I now wish to refer to research and development. A rather cynical history master once told me that, even if one is totally baffled by an exam question, one was assured of being awarded one mark out of 10 if one wrote one's name on the paper, copied out the question and added the words, "This is a very important issue". On research and development, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East does not seem to have got much further than that, although we must award him his mark for recognising that it is an important issue. He gets no marks, however, for his blind faith that what is needed is more taxpayers' money. The amount of research and development carried out by business is a function of industry's profitability. Over the past five years, business spending on research and development has risen by nearly 50 per cent. as profitability has been restored.

Nevertheless, the Government have a positive role to play in stimulating research and development. Britain has been phenomenally successful in academic science. Our scientists have won more Nobel prizes than those of any other major country except the United States. We have won more than Germany, three times as many as France and 13 times as many as Japan. Yet until recently, we have been conspicuously unsuccessful in exploiting that wealth of scientific talent for industrial purposes.

Our failure to do so has certainly not been due to inadequate funding by the Government. We spend nearly £3 billion a year on civil research and development—more, relative to our gross domestic product, than Japan and the United States. The real problem has been the divorce of industry from the scientific community. We have had to bring them together.

When we came to power, only two universities had industrial or science parks.

Ms. Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East): Oh.

Mr. Lilley: It seems that the hon. Lady does not even know what industrial and science parks are. Now, 38 universities have them, and many of them have already been immensely successful in converting scientific ideas into new products and businesses. Nineteen more are planned, and I am investigating the scope for more such facilities, to be attached to polytechnics and Government research establishments. In addition, I shall shortly announce details of some new programmes to help small and medium-sized businesses to exploit our scientific talent.

The successful enterprise initiative is to be extended for a final three years, and I shall be spelling out the details in a parliamentary answer today. I reaffirm our commitment to privatise the British Technology Group, which has a proven track record in the commercial exploitation of our scientific discoveries.

Mr. Gordon Brown: I want the House to be clear about the Government's privatisation plan. Does the right hon. Gentleman recall the pamphlet that he wrote last November, in which he stated his view that the Post Office should be returned to the private sector?

Mr. Lilley: Would the hon. Gentleman care to read my words?

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Gentleman wrote:

"That would still leave in the state sector the Post Office. The presumption in every case must be that they should be restored to the private sector unless there are good reasons for retaining them in the public sector."

Is that still the right hon. Gentleman's view? Will the Post Office remain in the public sector?

Mr. Lilley: Those are exactly the words to which I would adhere.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East yesterday criticised the planned budget for the Department of Trade and Industry, which he thought reflected a cut in support for innovation. I am afraid that the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not understand the figures, although that is perfectly understandable, as they were complex and as he had little time to study them before the Autumn Statement. The biggest single change in the Department's budget as between this year and next is in the external financing position of the Post Office. This year, the Post Office has been absorbing taxpayers' funds. Next year, it is expected to pay a dividend to the taxpayer. That means a net turnround of £100 million to the taxpayer's advantage.

The second greatest change is in launch aid. The net figure is set to go negative next year, but that is because levy payments from successful past launches are set to exceed even the £80 million of additional launch aid in the budget. What a contrast with the budget of the industrial Department under Labour. It poured out money by the billion, but the cash did not go on research and development: it went to meet the massive losses of

nationalised industries. None of it came back to the taxpayer. That Department backed failure, but we back success.

Opposition Members have displayed a commendable interest in the Government's European policy, and it is only courteous that we should reciprocate. I heard nothing of substance in the reply of the Leader of the Opposition to the Gracious Speech so I turned to his recent interview on the "Today" programme. Clearly, there must be a statement of Labour policy somewhere in the transcript, but I found it as difficult to decipher as Linear B, so I shall have to call on the help of members of the Opposition Front Bench Trade and Industry team, who I assume are more familiar than I am with their policy and their leader's involved style.

Perhaps I could ask the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East some simple questions. First, is the Labour party in favour of an independent European central bank? Or do they not know? [HON. MEMBERS: "Come on."]

Mr. Prescott: Is it in the script to shout "Come on"?

Mr. Lilley: No, it is spontaneous. Why does not the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East respond? Is it simply that he does not know?

Mr. Gordon Brown: We have made our views very clear.

Mr. Lilley: Would it be correct to say that the Labour party is in favour of an independent central bank?

Mr. Brown: I am not taking any lectures from the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Lilley: The Leader of the Opposition was unequivocal on the point. It was almost the only clear and precise statement in his interview. He said:

"There cannot be an independent bank."

Secondly, is the Labour party in favour of the Government policy of a hard ecu? Here is an opportunity for the hon. Gentleman to clarify the position, which he says is already very clear. He has not been unforthcoming in venturing his views so far, but he is now strangely reluctant to rise from the Bench. We do not know. The House is left unsure of whether the Labour party is in favour of a hard ecu.

The Leader of the Opposition criticised the hard ecu as wholly beyond the realms of practicality because it would be so successful that it would sweep the board, everyone would use it and it would become the single currency. That was a strange argument from him. He seemed to go on to argue that he was in favour of a single currency. He made his view clear in the interview but then reports began to appear in the newspapers that his office had said that "Neil had not intended to say that." In the memorable word of President Nixon's press secretary, his words were "inoperative". Which statement was right—what he said on the "Today" programme or that with which his office briefed the newspapers? The Labour party has the opportunity here and now to make its position clear, but Labour Members are too confused to do so.

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Is it not an absolute disgrace that a party which wants to form the Government of this country does not have the guts to tell the British people whether or not it wants to conserve the self-governing status of the nation? Do we not expect to hear from the Labour party today in clear and concise terms where it stands? Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if it cannot, it is not fit to govern the country?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is a disgrace, but it is no great surprise. The shilly-shallying of the Labour party is exactly in tune with its history. It opposed membership of the Common Market. It favoured renegotiation—although it was unsuccessful in campaigning on that basis. It stood on a manifesto commitment to withdraw from the EEC in 1983. In 1987, it promised to take actions which were incompatible with the treaty of Rome and would force withdrawal. Subsequently, it has said that it is the most enthusiastic European party in the House. It has left the position wholly unclear, and its present flirtation with Euro-rhetoric will be just as unconvincing to the electorate as its past manoeuvres.

Mr. Gordon Brown: The position was not unclear yesterday.

Mr. Lilley: If the hon. Gentleman suggests that I have shilly-shallyed over Europe he is wrong.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made his Autumn Statement to the House. He demonstrated that the finances of the country are in better shape than those of America, Germany, France or any major country except Japan. He showed that inflation will fall sharply next year pointing the way to lower interest rates. He demonstrated that growth will resume before long at a fair lick. Despite a tight overall settlement, he found funds for higher spending on health, education and transport.

We can look forward to the next decade with confidence, as long as we pursue the sound policies which transformed the economy in the past decade and which are further strengthened by the policies outlined in the Gracious Speech.

10.5 am

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Perhaps it is not surprising that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry spoke for half an hour but failed even to mention the words Bradford and Bootle. I well understand his reticence. In the early hours of this morning—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members might listen—we saw an electoral humiliation visited on the Conservative party as a direct result of the mistaken policies of an out-of-touch Prime Minister in a failed, divided, and now discredited Government.

The message from Bootle and Bradford is clear: while the Prime Minister may contrive to win an election victory within the narrow compass of the Conservative parliamentary party, consisting of 369 rather frightened men and women, she cannot win the only election that really matters—the one that will deliver the verdict of the British people.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Gentleman explain how winning 5 per cent. of the vote at Eastbourne proves that the Labour party is going anywhere?

Mr. Brown: If the hon. Gentleman looks at what has happened around the country during the past two years he will find that in by-elections, local elections, European elections and opinion polls, the Labour party has not only increased but deepened its support. The hon. Gentleman

[Mr. Brown]

might reflect on the results in Bootle and Bradford. The Conservative party managed to obtain 6 per cent. of the vote in Bootle and 17 per cent. in Bradford—a seat which they previously held. The hon. Gentleman is the last person who should mention Eastbourne, which was a devastating defeat for the Conservative Government.

The reason why the country is passing that verdict is clear. Yesterday more than 1,000 jobs were lost in Scotland. Today as many jobs will be lost around the country. This week three small businesses have gone bankrupt every hour. A job is lost in manufacturing every two minutes. Many small businesses are experiencing not a soft or even a hard landing, but a crash landing. Worst of all, as the autumn statement revealed, the Government's only strategy for the future is to seek a repetition of the mistakes of the past.

The autumn statement made it clear, but the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry did not mention, that manufacturing output is predicted to fall in 1991. Business investment is predicted to fall even further—by 2·5 per cent. Next year, inflation, which the Government said was their flagship policy, and which they promised to bring down to zero, will still be higher, taking the underlying rate —The Government's favoured indicator—than the European average.

If the Conservative party will not listen to us or to the electorate, will it listen to the voice of business throughout the country? The chairman of the Building Employers Federation said only the other day:

"I can see no early prospect of recovery".

The chairman of the Engineering Employers Federation said:

"The prospect is for a substantial further reduction in the total employment in engineering"—

not in 1990 or 1991, but "in 1992." Mr. John Harris, chairman of the National Federation of Self Employed and Small Businesses said:

"Industry has been asked to swallow a cocktail of disasters."

At the CBI conference, Mr. Ron Lander said:

"We are living on borrowed time."

At the same conference, Mr. Roland Long said:

"Inflation is not an act of God . . . It is caused by economic mismanagement."

If the Secretary of State were doing his job properly, he would be addressing the concerns expressed in every sector of industry about the state of industry as a result of the high interest rate policy of his Government. My final quote comes from Mr. Richard Pickard, a small shopkeeper from Grantham who owns a shop not far from that in which the Prime Minister was brought up. He said:

"Any other management team in such a mess would get the sack. I voted for them but now I cannot wait to get them out."

No wonder that the Foreign Secretary made a telling comment only a few days ago when he said on "The World At One":

"What we need is a period of competence."

I hesitate to say anything that will add to the Government's problems and difficulties, but it is only right that Conservative Back-Bench Members, who may not be aware of these things, should hear me say something about at least one of the business closures that have been such a casualty of the recent recession. This business is close to the heart of many Conservative Members. An interesting little company, centrally placed, well-endowed, with influential contacts, was set up in the heady atmosphere that followed the 1979 election. It addressed carefully identified market niches and was not only part of the Thatcher enterprise culture but was set up explicitly to celebrate it. I refer to the collapse of Blue Rosette Ltd., late of Smith square, Westminster, London. The company was set up to sell to the faithful Tory products in a range that epitomised the iconography of Thatcherism—the dish towels, the ash trays, the ties and the scarves. It was founded in 1979 and is now being liquidated, with all the bargains that come from a liquidation sale. The Tory party coffee mug was £5·25 and is now selling at £3·10. The party's official headscarf was £7·95 and is now £3·95, with free delivery thrown in.

Conservative Members may be interested to know that the "I love Maggie" tee-shirt was £3·95 and is now just £1·95. There are still a few available at knock-down prices. I see that there are no takers among Conservative Members here and I doubt whether there are any takers among the members of the Cabinet. Perhaps if the company had diversified a little, it would be in a better position. Perhaps it should have introduced a "Sir Geoffrey Howe memorial plate" or the "Sir Geoffrey sheepskin rug" or the "Sir Geoffrey doormat". Conservative Members share 800 directorships. There are 20 ex-ministerial recruits to the boardrooms of the City, but they cannot even run the party equivalent of a church bazaar without losing thousands of pounds. If, by their own voluntary efforts, they cannot sell their own products to their own fans without making a huge loss, what can Conservative Members run?

There are two explanations for this failure. Either Conservative Members, despite their much-vaunted business acumen, cannot run anything, or, as the Secretary of State keeps reminding us, one cannot sell the goods for which there is no demand. The market has passed its verdict and the closing-down sale of the Thatcher era has already begun.

Let me tell the Secretary of State what he should have said today. What he should have said about the industrial policies that are necessary for us to get the benefit of membership of the exchange rate mechanism was that the Chancellor, in his autumn statement and subsequent statements, would take action on the skill shortage, with a national training strategy underpinned by the Government. Secondly, he should have told us that there would be action to make Britain once again the technology capital of Europe, with an end to the damaging reduction in the budgets for research and development. Thirdly, he should have told us that, to help interest rates come down, the Government would specifically rule out tax cuts in the forthcoming Budget and concentrate their energies on public investment. Fourthly, he should have said that he would bring in measures to ensure a properly balanced economy in Britain with a commitment to a modern regional policy similar to that of our competitors.

Mr. Lilley: For the benefit of the House and of the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether his calls for additional measures on training, regional development and innovation involve pledges to spend more money than is laid out in the autumn statement?

Mr. Brown: We are saying clearly that we would not make these cuts. If the Secretary of State is asking me

whether a Labour Government wants to spend more on the regions and training, the answer is yes. The resources available to us will depend on the economic circumstances of the time. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] I cannot foresee all the damage that will be done by the Government, even in the next few months, to public finances and the economy. However, I am clear about one thing. Employers recognise the need to invest in training. The CBI's report on skill shortages and training says that employers should be spending £800 million more, and we need a Government who are prepared to work in partnership with industry to ensure that the money is properly spent.

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): The hon. Member spoke about the resources that would be available. What boost to industry would be given by a Labour Government legalising secondary picketing?

Mr. Brown: It is typical of Conservative Members that they return to the debates of the 1970s and have no interest in moving forward to the debates of the 1990s. Our industrial relations policy is in line with that of most, if not all, of our successful European competitors in almost every sector. If the hon. Gentleman feels that we should have a modern industrial relations policy, as I do, why does not he support the social charter of the European Commission, which has overwhelming support from the work forces of this country, and significant support from many companies?

Mr. Robert Hughes: Is my hon. Friend aware that the unions involved in the North sea oil dispute thought that they had an agreement with the employers—the contractors—by which those who were dismissed because they had recently taken industrial action in the North sea would be reinstated? But the contractors went off and then came back saying that they had been directed by the oil companies not to reach such a deal under any circumstances. Is not that secondary action of the worst kind?

Mr. Brown: The problem in the North sea is that the men have been forced to resort to industrial action because they have no prospect of industrial negotiation. I hope that Conservative Members will join me in calling on the employers to resume talks with the trade unions in the North sea industry so that we can bring an end to the dispute. At the heart of the dispute is the men's concern about safety in the North sea—a concern that will be highlighted on Monday by the publication of the Piper Alpha report.

The problems that we face are not accidents of fate. They are not, as the Secretary of State tried to tell us this morning, common problems shared by all our European competitors. They have been created uniquely in Britain by this Cabinet and this Government. Employment in industry is rising in France, Germany and Italy but it is falling in Britain. Output in manufacturing is rising by 5 per cent. in Germany this year, on the eve of the creation of a single market, by nearly 2 per cent. in Spain, and by 1·5 per cent. in France, but has fallen by £1 billion in Britain in the past three months.

Industrial investment is rising in Europe this year by nearly 10 per cent., but it is stagnating here, and the reason for that is clear: the interest rate bill that industry faced in 1979 was £6 billion, but this year it is £24 billion. Next year —the year before the creation of the single market, when the competitive challenges will be greater than ever before —it is predicted that investment in Germany will be rising by 4 per cent., in France and Italy by 6 per cent., in the European Community as a whole by 5 per cent. while in Britain it is predicted to fall by 2·5 per cent. That will be the worst possible start for British industry in the internal market.

These are disastrous industrial trends, which cannot be blamed on the Gulf crisis, the American recession or the European Commission. They are a problem caused directly by the mistakes of this Prime Minister, this Cabinet and this Government. We have had 11 years of a Government who promised that we would have zero inflation, said that they had created an economic miracle and told us that stop-go economics had been abolished once and for all. Inflation, which the Government promised to reduce to zero, is now 10·9 per cent., higher than that of all our main European competitors. In 1979, the Government blamed the previous Labour Government for the level of unemployment. They said that the Labour Government's policies had not worked, but for many years unemployment has been at least 50 per cent. higher than it was then, and again it is rising.

What about mortgage rates? I hope that Conservative Members are concerned about the problems of home owners. They were facing problems in 1979 because of what the Conservative party described in its manifesto as Government financial mismanagement. The current rate of interest is 14·5 per cent., which the Chancellor of the Exchequer used to call usurious.

If anyone had dared say to Conservative Members in 1979 that, after 11 years of what they promised would be an economic revolution, 11 years during which Chancellors of the Exchequer were variously described as brilliant, marvellous and wonderful, 11 years during which the Prime Minister and her Ministers told us that Germany and Japan had had the economic miracles of the past and that Britain's would be the economic miracle of the present, 11 years during which the Government, uniquely, have had £100 billion of revenues from North sea oil, Britain would have the highest inflation, the greatest trade gap, the slowest growth, the least investment and the worst interest rates of all our major competitors, they would have told us that we were talking about another country, another Prime Minister and another Government.

There is no escape for the Government now. Their failures are clear. After 11 years of a Conservative Prime Minister and Conservative free market ideology, we are entitled to more than promises that things will get better. We are entitled to a full explanation of what has gone wrong. The rate of company liquidations is rising. In many areas the number of liquidations will double this year. What is proposed in the autumn statement? The Government say that we should compound the interest rate problems that companies face by hitting them with further cuts in support services for industry. Having hit industry with the worst interest rates of all the main European economies, the Government are now hitting it with some of the biggest budget cuts. There is to be a 22 per cent. cut in the industrial research and development budget this year. There will be a 40 per cent. cut in the technology transfer budget and a 67 per cent. cut in regional enterprise grants.

Small firms will be hit hardest of all. The Secretary of State mentioned the Government's flagship programme——

Mr. Lilley: I acknowledged the cause of present inflation, diagnosed the cure that is needed and spelt out the costs that inevitably will be incurred in reducing it. The hon. Gentleman could at least answer the question that I posed to him. Does he have an alternative solution for reducing inflation that does not involve a period of slower growth of demand?

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Gentleman asked, first, for my analysis of what has gone wrong. Three years ago, any fool could have told the Government, who had engineered a consumer boom before the general election and thereafter, that without prior, sustained, long-term investment in the British economy, imports would rise at an alarmingly fast rate after the boom and there would be a widening trade gap. The Government went ahead with the boom and accordingly there were pressures on interest rates, which had to be forced up. In the wake of that came inflationary bottlenecks.

The damaging feature of high interest rates—*[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members had listened to the Secretary of State, they would know that I was asked for an analysis of what has gone wrong. I shall give the House the benefit of the Labour party's analysis. Anyone could have told the Government that a Government who concentrated on a policy of high interest rates were bound to hit employment, investment and output.

One of the problems is that the Government have barely hit the growth of new credit. They have pursued a consumer boom that has not been accompanied by investment. Their high interest rate policy is further damaging prospects of investment in future. That is why we say that in addition to the macro-economic stability that we propose—we proposed that we should join the exchange rate mechanism many months ago——

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): On what terms?

Mr. Brown: Under the terms that we proposed.

In addition to macro-economic stability, Britain needs a boost to investment in industry, and that would be provided by the supply side strategy that we have put forward. It is ludicrous for the Government to cut their flagship programme, the consultancy initiative for smaller businesses. The Secretary of State told us that there would be a written answer dealing with that later today. It might have been better had he brought the figures to the House for his speech. The fact is that this year there has been a 24 per cent. cut in what the Government said was their flagship programme. To cut the industry budget by £250 million in the coming year—a 20 per cent. cut, and one that is greater than that made by any other major Department—the Secretary of State tells us——

Mr. Lilley: Figures.

Mr. Brown: If the Secretary of State wants to give the House the figures, I shall give way to him. Perhaps he will tell us what the cuts are.

Mr. Lilley: I did so in my speech. It is clear that the hon. Gentleman was not listening.

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Gentleman did not tell us of the cut in the budget for the consultancy initiatives. Perhaps he will tell us now. It seems that he is not prepared to do so. I shall help him. The initiative, which started only three years ago, will be cut by 24 per cent. this year. There has been a 7 per cent. cut in the science and technology initiative. These were supposed to be the flagship programmes of the Department. How does it make things better for industry if the Government cut deeper into the budget for services for industry? The Secretary of State will not act when so many businesses are failing, but other countries are taking action while we are doing nothing. When will he act to improve services for business? The tragedy is that he refuses to act because of the ideological constraints that he has imposed upon himself, not because of budget constraints that have been imposed from outside upon his Department.

What needs to be done in the Department of Trade and Industry and in other economic Departments? The United Kingdom is training fewer people to enable them to apply skills than in any other country. Fewer children stay on at school, fewer leave with qualifications and fewer in the work force are trained than in other main European countries. Even with rising unemployment, 25 per cent. of companies are identifying skill shortages. We are short of about 30,000 computer scientists. Market forces have clearly failed to deliver. In other countries, Governments are working in partnership with industry. What do the Government do? It was announced yesterday that there would be a further cut in the training budget, even though the Government proclaim the need for a training revolution.

The Government have failed on training and they have failed on technology. I grant that the Secretary of State gave us many figures relating to technology, but we spend less on civilian research, when considered as a share of the national budget, than do France or Germany, and certainly less than Japan. The Government's contribution is less in Britain than contributions in other countries.

What is the Secretary of State being advised to do on technology and research and development? The innovation advisory board in his Department says that there is

"too high a priority for short-term profits and dividends at the expense of R and D and other innovative investment."

Beyond a speech, the Government have done nothing. The DTI-funded Design Council said that as spending on research and development falls even further, relegation to the second division of industrial countries is a real prospect. Yet the Government do nothing. The Engineering Employers Federation said:

"Government seems to have almost completely abandoned the provision of financial support for innovation."

The Government do nothing.

In the newest technologies, such as biotechnology, the Government's Advisory Committee on Science and Technology—a semi-official committee set up by the Prime Minister—said that

"our potential for leadership in many areas is being eroded",

and that

"major UK developments . . . are being exploited by competitor multinational companies".

They are not exploited by British multinational companies and the Government do nothing.

On information technology, a Select Committee with a Tory majority has said that the "Government has no strategy", yet the Government do nothing. On technology transfer, the CBI reports that the DTI does pitifully little, with delays, inadequate resources, an inappropriate approach and

"programmes more concerned with the public relations effect than supporting UK industry."

Yet the Government do nothing. It is clear that no last-gasp initiatives in the last year of this Government, no

scheme to paper over the cracks and no public relations manoeuvres can undo or disguise the damage that 11 years of neglect have done to our country.

Other countries are working in partnership to build for 1992. France has its regional poles and growth centres, its support for small business and its technology transfer network, ANVAR. Germany has low-interest loans for industry, which are being given priority. There are 100 technology transfer organisations in one Conservative-dominated länder alone, while we are cutting support for technology transfer. In Japan, the Government provide help for about 185 testing and research centres for small firms and are leading the bold plans for research into energy-efficient technologies, new materials and the next generation of high definiton television technologies, yet Britain is doing next to nothing. Even in America, the federal Government are setting up regional manufacturing technology centres to help small firms—yet the British Government are doing nothing and are being left behind.

We need an export drive, especially into eastern Europe, but what do we have instead? During the past year there have been cuts in support for international trade missions and for export market research, there have been new charges for small businesses and other exporters, and now there is to be the privatisation of the insurance section of the Export Credits Guarantee Department. That will not increase the number of shareholders because it is to be a trade sale; it will not bring in any cash for the Government; according to exporters it will do nothing to improve services for them; and, as I have been told directly, it is especially worrying for the 6,000 small businesses which use that service. Our export priorities should be directed towards advancing the sale of our goods and services abroad, rather than to an obsession with selling the means to service our export services at home.

Nowhere is the Government's do nothing attitude more obvious than in their dealings with industry. When the oil companies are accused of making excess profits, the Government do nothing. When City regulation is an issue, they do nothing. When the steel plant at Ravenscraig closes—as the Secretary of State has confirmed that it will —the Department of Trade and Industry makes a virtue of doing nothing. When the Government have a golden share in British Steel—it is in the possession of the Department of Trade and Industry—when the Department has guarantees from British Steel about its future plans in Scotland, whon a highly productive work force has done everything asked of it, when the Government are in the North sea market at the Clydesdale plant, which should be making millions for Britain because it is the only British company producing tubes for that market, and without it orders will flow abroad, is not it a scandal that the Department of Trade and Industry is prepared to do nothing, not even to put pressure on British Steel to reconsider its decision?

I used to think that the Department of Trade and Industry, under the previous Secretary of State, did nothing as a matter of deep personal inclination. I know that it does nothing because of the dogma of political ideology. I shall quote what industry is saying about the Department. The Machine Tools Technology Association says that there are no policies

"to help markets allocate resources to investment, innovation and training."

The Mechanical and Metal Trades Confederation says:

"Our members feel there is a need for a strong cohesive DTI."

Mr. John Banham of the CBI says that his

"members believe that too often the DTI is like a spectator on the stands watching the team playing rather than someone who is at least on the touch lines shouting instructions and preferably down on the pitch playing in the right direction."

The Department makes a virtue of doing nothing, even to the point that at the recent CBI conference the Department of Employment, the Training Agency, the Central Office of Information and even the industry department from Georgia, America had stands, but not the Department of Trade and Industry. There must be a reason for that inaction, and it is ideology.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): The hon. Gentleman, like me, goes through the appalling ordeal of attending party conferences and being surrounded by absurd stalls that are set out for our edification, and from which we frequently receive free bottles of whisky from corrupt whisky distillers. What good purpose would have been served by the Department having a stand at the CBI conference?

Mr. Brown: Exactly the same purpose as the industry department from Georgia thought would be served——

Mr. Lilley: My Department has a successful division that attracts foreign business to Britain. We have more American, Japanese and German business investing in this country than is being invested in any other country. It is a little absurd to suggest that we should have a division to attract British industry to Britain.

Mr. Brown: If the Department had refused to go to the CBI conference in Glasgow so that it could go elsewhere and attract industry to Britain, I might have welcomed what the right hon. Gentleman said. However, the Department turned down an invitation to be the lead exhibitor at the recent trade fair in Hanover. That is the position into which the Department has pushed British industry. It is failing British industry not only at home, but abroad.

Mr. Roger Moate (Faversham): The hon. Gentleman promised the House answers to rather more significant questions. Perhaps he will stop knocking Britain and British industry. He said earlier that his party's policies on Europe were clear, and he implied that he would explain them during his speech. We are entitled to some clarity. He appears to be offering regional subsidies and policies that would be in conflict with European rules, and spending commitments that would contradict the disciplines of ERM. I want some clarity. Does his party support or not support the statement by the Leader of the Opposition——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Interventions should be brief.

Mr. Moate: Does the hon. Gentleman support a single currency?

Mr. Brown: I still have a great deal to say, and I had intended to deal with that point later. However, as the hon. Gentleman is pressing, I shall deal with it now. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition and my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor said that greater economic integration within Europe is not only inevitable but desirable. They said that the Labour party

[Mr. Brown]

is prepared to play its part in constructive and positive discussions. We support the implementation of the social charter and majority voting on social and environmental issues. On the question of economic and monetary union, we have made it clear that while we do not support the Delors proposals for fiscal harmonisation, for set public expenditure ceilings or for a central bank that is not politically accountable, we are prepared to join in the present discussions and help them to reach a satisfactory conclusion.

I shall tell the hon. Gentleman the difference between his party and ours. His party, under the Prime Minister, in performing a backward-looking, obstructionist and isolationist role, is doing enormous damage to Britain's interests. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has made it clear that a Labour Government will play a forward-looking, positive and constructive role, desirous of achieving the maximum economic co-ordination.

Mr. Moate *rose——*

Mr. Brown: I have fully answered the hon. Gentleman's questions and I must now get on with my speech.

Mr. Moate *rose——*

Mr. Brown: I have answered the hon. Gentleman and I think that Mr. Deputy Speaker will accept that I cannot give way again. I have fully answered a point that I intended to deal with later in my speech.

The tragedy is that the Department is failing to support British industry, not because of budgetary constraints but because of ideological constraints. The Department has a Secretary of State who is the leading member of the No Turning Back group. The Minister of State is the philosopher for the group. The Under-Secretary, who has just joined the Department, was the spokesman for the group only a few weeks ago.

Mr. Soames: What is it?

Mr. Brown: For the benefit of Conservative Members, I shall explain what it is. That group proposed the implementation of the poll tax, the abolition of the top rate of tax, a reduction in capital taxes—to be funded by cuts in public services—and the abolition of the national health service and the welfare state as we know it. It appears from its publications that its industry policy is opposed to any training or regional policies in Europe. Its only policy that might affect the future of industry is a major proposal for the economy that flies in the face of experience and common sense—it wants to declare Britain a free port.

I shall quote from the group's recent policy document. It states:

"If all our eleven partners sign up to a single currency, we should deploy our prized freedom to advance the concept of the UK as a kind of free port linking Europe and the world in accordance with our aims for domestic policy. We can draw inspiration from the examples of Hong Kong and Singapore and other flourishing Asian states."

In that the future for Britain—not selling its skills, inventiveness, products and innovations in manufacturing goods, but a state without regulations or standards, like the free ports of a century ago?

I must tell the No Turning Back group that free ports were tried in 1979. There were six, but three no longer exist. The only free thing about them was that they were free of any industry. As the Treasury said, the free zones attracted very little additional activity to the United Kingdom—probably only 150 jobs, and few of them were additional to the United Kingdom as a whole.

Are we to believe, with the evidence of those failed free ports, that this nation should put its entire national economy at risk by making the Britain of the 1990s the equivalent of the Tangiers or Shanghai of a century ago? That is a high road to nowhere, heading straight into the wilderness. The tragedy is that the Government are taking our trade and industry with them.

I dwell on the views of the No Turning Back group because the choice that will exist at the next general election is already clear. When more than ever we need positive and constructive economic co-operation across frontiers, we have a Conservative Government who are locking themselves into dogma and lurching towards a free market isolationism that can only damage Britain. When more than ever we need a proper partnership with industry, to develop skills, technology and investment strength for the future, we see a Conservative party hijacked by a faction that proposes yet more reliance on the hazards and uncertainties of free market forces.

Look round Britain this month, and at the state of its economic and social fabric. We see patients who have been told by their health authorities to bring their own bandages. We see youngsters living in cardboard cities in the centre of London. We see mothers unable to send their children to school because they cannot afford to buy shoes for them. This is the Government of the opt-out school, the opt-out hospital, and of poll tax, and they have abandoned any concept of social cohesion.

As we see unemployment rising, output falling, industrial capacity shrinking, investment stagnating, and our competitors moving ahead at an alarming rate, it is clear that the Government have failed to build an economy for the future. If this country is to have the social justice and economic prosperity that it needs, it will have to look to Labour.

10.42 am

Mr. Tony Favell (Stockport): Before I address the subject of trade and industry, I want to raise an issue that concerns me greatly as a Member of Parliament representing a Greater Manchester constituency. Greater Manchester Buses is a company run by the Greater Manchester transport executive, and over the past two years it has operated at a loss of £10 million. Free enterprise competition is being driven out of business, yet the company is refusing to raise its fares. That is a disgrace, and is contrary to the free enterprise initiative under the Transport Act 1985. I ask my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport to address himself to that urgent problem.

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Cecil Parkinson) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Favell: I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend.

I am grateful for this opportunity to address the House, because it is the first time that I have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, since my resignation as Parliamentary Private Secretary to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, which position I held for more than four years. Four years is long enough as a Parliamentary

Private Secretary, as any of my right hon. and hon. Friends will appreciate—and in my case, perhaps particularly so. That is not to say that I did not enjoy every moment of working for a man who enjoys the respect of every right hon. and hon. Member, regardless of his or her political persuasion. He is the most decent, honest and able man for whom I have ever had the privilege to work. I enjoyed every moment of those four years. I was delighted to hear him say yesterday that the economy will soon be on course. It could not be in better hands than those of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, and I was particularly glad to hear his comments yesterday, because I have a majority of 2,800.

Mr. Soames: Has my hon. Friend spoken to his constituency chairman lately?

Mr. Favell: I have. I speak to him regularly.

I am also glad of the opportunity to speak in this debate because it is the last on trade and industry and on the Loyal Address before the 150th anniversary of the arrival in the House of Stockport's most illustrious representative. He was a giant among parliamentarians. He was a Liberal, and I speak of Richard Cobden. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) might have some comments to make about Richard Cobden, but I shall say something first.

Richard Cobden would find extraordinary the Liberal party as it is today, and be astonished by the changes in that once great party. Richard Cobden was a free trader who would have found it difficult to argue with most, if any, of the policies of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. He was opposed to protectionism in any form, tariffs, and excessive Government spending—but in favour of a reduction in Government debt. All four of those policies have been pursued by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and her Government.

Richard Cobden made his final speech to the House on 22 July 1886, when he introduced a motion to prevent the Government from manufacturing themselves articles that could be obtained from private producers in a competitive market. Richard Cobden would have been welcomed on these Benches, and I dare say in the No Turning Back group, of which I am a member.

Richard Cobden's most famous act was to fight for eight years against the corn laws. He was a founder of the Anti-Corn Law League, and deplored the protection of wealthy landowners against competition from abroad. He would have been appalled by the shenanigans that we recently witnessed in connection with the common agricultural policy and by the argument that world free trade should be placed in jeopardy to support Bavarian farmers.

It would not be difficult to imagine on whose side Richard Cobden would be in the emerging debate between M. Delors and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister over their visions of a future Europe. His principles were encapsulated in a single great phrase:

"The maximum of intercourse between nations, the minimum of connection between Governments."

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is totally opposed to a united states of Europe, and I am certain that Richard Cobden and the Manchester Liberals would have shared her view.

The Rome summit proposals include a single currency, and European control over taxation, the environment and social affairs. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) now appears to be opposed to the use of a veto against Community proposals for taxation, environment and social affairs.

Mr. Gordon Brown: Only on social affairs and the environment.

Mr. Favell: There would not be much left for this House to do. Richard Cobden would also have been appalled by removing such powers from this Parliament and giving them to Brussels.

One must remember what others of our partners have been saying recently. The Danes once fervently opposed any increase in European control, but now say that they are in favour of European money control, a central bank, a single currency, and European control over matters affecting culture, health and education. In other words, a united states of Europe. Some hon. Members suggest that we should board the Eurotrain not knowing where it is going. It is clear in my mind, that of the Prime Minister and, I venture to add, in the minds of the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Secretary of State for Transport, where the people who have control of the Eurotrain are determined that it should head: for the united states of Europe.

At the first get together of the Christian Democrat party after German reunification, Chancellor Kohl said that European unity and German unity were two sides of the same coin. It is quite clear where he thought that the European express was heading. Earlier this year, President Mitterrand said that the Community has a "federal finality". That is not what people in this country voted for in a referendum. They voted for the breakdown of barriers between Community countries. They were certainly not voting for a federal state.

I do not think that any Conservative Member would argue with the 1992 proposals. Nor would the Manchester Liberals, because the free movement of goods, people, services and capital are wonderful things and we are in the vanguard, working for those proposals.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry talked about free trade, the prosperity that it brings and the way in which it draws nations together.

My son went around Europe in the summer using an Inter rail ticket. It was a marvellous experience. He went to Community countries and to eastern Europe. I do not think that he had any idea whether he was within the Community or outside it as there were no barriers between them. When he came back he talked about the friendliness of the people whom he met, their diversity and individualism. I envy him. He even went to the reunification celebrations in Berlin.

The free movement of goods, people and services is wonderful and we should not put it in jeopardy, but I believe that by trying to make one nation out of 12 we would jeopardise all the good things that the European Community has achieved.

As the hon. Members for Gordon and for Livingston (Mr. Cook) know, it takes a long time to mould two countries together, and here we are talking about 12 countries. The Act of Union was passed in 1707—almost 300 years ago—but at Scottish Question Time we still hear a constant Scottish moan about Westminster's lack of understanding of what is going on in Scotland, or about the lack of a voice for people in Scotland. There are some independent Members who represent Scottish seats and

[Mr. Favell]

there is still an independence movement within Scotland. Yet, we live in one island, we have intermarried, we speak one language, we have free trade and a single currency. We have fought and beaten dictators such as Napoleon, Hitler, and Galtieri. We have won and lost an empire together and yet there are still strains. So, what on earth is the chance of Greece, Ireland, Britain and Denmark working together as one nation, as is suggested by the European federalists? It will inevitably end in tears. It will be a disaster and it will put at risk so much that is good and so much that the British want; a free market for goods, services, people and capital. A marvellous thing will be destroyed by trying to achieve the impossible.

10.53 am

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): When I saw the Conservative party chairman on television last night, I began to think that the Tory party was getting desperate. The hon. Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) prays in aid Cobden as a great Tory, which shows that they are truly desperate. They are going further and further back into history to try to justify what is happening today.

One of the problems is that, instead of making a speech which tried to analyse the problems we face, to chart some way ahead and to explain how the real difficulties that the country faces might be solved, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry chose to indulge in a little parliamentary knockabout, as though the economy were of little account. The trouble is that the same thing happened yesterday, when we heard a speech by the Chancellor, in elegant Treasury prose. It was nicely read out. But he could not bring himself to deal with the real problems. He could not bring himself to pronounce the word "recession", but instead spoke about "weak activity".

A few weeks ago when he was questioned about the problems arising from recession, the Chancellor said that people who speak like that are "over-indulging in reality". What on earth does that mean? It is a wonderful phrase, but it is wholly misleading, and a retreat into fantasy.

As we all know, the problem is that the economy is in great difficulty. This morning, the Secretary of State spoke about short-termism. He sought to chide the Opposition for being more concerned with short-term than long-term issues. The history of the Government has been one of short-termism. In the past 11 years, all we have been offered are palliatives.

I saw a newspaper report the other day that the Chancellor has a tooth abscess, and I commiserate with him. I am genuinely sorry, as it can be very painful. His office said that he could not have the abscess treated for some weeks, but was taking oil of cloves to deaden the pain.

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): Whisky is better.

Mr. Hughes: Yes, whisky is better. As an aside, I hope that when the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) goes to Conservative party conferences and gets bottles of whisky he will invite me there, or send them to me because we certainly do not get any at the Labour party conference.

The Chancellor said that he could not deal with his tooth abscess and has to take oil of cloves. The Government will never face up to a problem but always provide a parliamentary paracetamol in the hope of deadening the pain, when we ought to be dealing with the root causes of the problems and not simply the symptoms. Frankly, the root cause is that the Government will not invest or plan—they are incapable of doing either.

Some of my hon. Friends know far more about the steel industry than I do, because it is in their constituencies. The steel industry is a prime example of failure to plan or invest. A few months ago we were told of the problems at Ravenscraig and the jobs that would be lost when the strip mill was closed. Yesterday we were told that the Clydesdale works is to close and that 1,200 jobs will go. It seems ridiculous that British Steel should be shutting down a plant which has great potential for work. There is no shortage of demand for its goods, either in the North sea, which is an important market, or worldwide.

The Government have refused to act and have stood by and watched the butchery of the steel industry. They gave the steel industry a short-term remit and said, "Fatten yourself up ready for privatisation. Buy cheap, sell dear, don't worry about manufacturing, just worry about buying and selling to make a profit."

The problem is that the Government say one thing but do something else. They tell us that they want expansion of trade and manufacturing, but that is always followed by their failure to do what is necessary to get expansion.

A small example in global economic terms, but one which will have wider repercussions was drawn to my attention some weeks ago, when the Prime Minister said that she wanted to expand trade with the USSR, in our own interests—obviously we want to expand trade—and to assist Mr. Gorbachev with his economic reforms.

The Scottish Pelagic Fishermen's Association applied for ECGD cover for its herring trade with the Soviet Union. It was told that it had been withdrawn, that nothing could be done and that it must stand the risk itself. When the association told me about this, I took the matter up with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—he is obviously not interested in the debate, but that does not surprise us in the least. It is normal courtesy for the Secretary of State not to turn his back and gossip with those behind him when a serious debate is taking place; however, that is typical of an upper-class education and the total arrogance with which he deals with other hon. Members.

I received a reply from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, who said that I must understand that the Government had not withdrawn ECGD cover entirely from trade with the Soviet Union. He said that it was a particular problem with the herring industry, because the state purchasing board was unable to guarantee that central Government would meet its funds; the risk was therefore too great for the ECGD to take, and it would not intervene.

I do not know what will happen to the herring industry if that cover is not restored. Instead of reacting in a positive way, going to the USSR and trying to solve the problems that have arisen because of a shortage of hard currency, the Government merely say that it is too risky a business—that they are withdrawing the cover and doing nothing about it. That will have serious repercussions for our trade. It simply will not do.

Recently, the Government have been complaining—perhaps with some justification—about the education system not being too good as regards reading, writing and arithmetic. I hope that the Secretary of State for Transport has been back to school and had his geography brushed up. Perhaps he will now have learnt—we must keep dinning into him if he has not—that the east coast main railway line runs not from London to Edinburgh, but Aberdeen to London and vice versa. It has always been the link between Aberdeen and London; it does not stop two thirds of the way at Edinburgh.

We must deal with electrification and rail freight. All the evidence suggests that British Rail is yet again thinking of cutting its rail freight distribution system in Scotland. That is appalling. The headlines trumpet about the channel tunnel finally being joined up, even though it is only a borehole a couple of inches wide; the Secretary of State has told us that it will provide a marvellous boost for the economy, and will benefit not just the south-east of England but the whole of the United Kingdom. However, when it comes to ensuring that there is a proper rail infrastructure, and that the regions benefit from the channel tunnel and have a chance to boost their manufacturing and exports, the Government do nothing: they merely stand by.

It is no use saying that the Government make the money available and it is up to British Rail to decide what to do. We know that—apart from official contacts and the exchange of letters—there is real contact with the people who run British Rail, and we know that they listen carefully to what the Government have to say.

I now wish to refer to a matter which is of great importance and becoming even more important. Last Saturday, I wrote to the Leader of the House to welcome him to his new job—it was a genuine welcome. I said that he might have thought that he was leaving the hot seat of education and coming to a quiet backwater. That is not so. The right hon. Gentleman has an important task to perform: he must grasp the nettle and establish a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. We have pressed for that for a number of years—indeed, ever since this Parliament came into being.

Paragraph 270 of the report of the Select Committee on Procedure, published on 23 October 1990, states:

"The reasons for this are at one level straightforward—the unwillingness of sufficient Conservative Members representing Scottish constituencies to serve on the Committee."

It goes on, in paragraph 271:

"We would observe, however, that the inability of the House to agree upon the membership of a Select Committee which its own Standing Orders state 'shall be appointed' is regrettable. Moreover, the absence of a Scottish Affairs Committee leaves a major Government Department unscrutinised and thus constitutes a deficiency (some would consider a serious deficiency)"—

We all agree with that—

"in the departmentally related Committee system. We agree in principle with the Chairman of the Liaison Committee that 'the cause of this problem is political and so must be its solution.' Nevertheless the power of initiative in this matter, as in many others, lies with the Government and the House is therefore entitled to look to the Leader of the House to continue the search for a solution, which may require compromise on all sides."

When the very powerful Procedure Committee is prepared to make such a statement, the Leader of the House really must act.

Many things should have been examined, but even now still require urgent attention. The steel industry, the fishing industry, the rail infrastructure, investment, the education system and the health service all need probing if we are to discover whether the Government's solutions—such as money going into the health service—are working. We also need to know whether housing issues are being dealt with.

The housing problem is growing week by week. Every time I have a constituency surgery, more young couples come to me saying that they have had to sell their house—that they could not afford the mortgage payments any more, that the high interest rates have killed them and that they have had to give up something that they desperately wanted. They tell me that they must have a house from the council. I tell them that they are entitled to a house from the council under the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977. Often they say that they were offered a house, but that it was pretty grotty because no repairs had been carried out. The whole housing fabric is collapsing, as is the Government's home ownership policy.

The problem with the Prime Minister and the Government is that they do not really want a debate about Europe. There are big issues to be discussed about the role of the central European bank—about how it should come into being, if indeed it should, and about how we can harmonise policies and the benefits which can flow from that. Studies done a few years ago show that, if all the countries in the European Economic Community were to reflate at the same rate in a planned direction, the benefits would not relate directly to the number of countries in the Community; it would be 10 times greater. There would be an immense expansion in jobs and manufacturing if we all worked together.

The problem is that the Prime Minister says that she is against this, she is against that, and she will not have certain things at any price; in the end, however, she has to sign on the dotted line and meekly accept what the others have decided for us. She then has another tantrum about how bad it is.

I must confess that I have changed my mind about Europe. I was a rampant anti-marketeer and voted against joining the EEC. I campaigned against my own Government at the time of the renegotiation, because I did not believe in the Common Market. However, I have come to accept, perhaps reluctantly—I am no enthusiast or zealot on these matters—that we are in the EEC and that we are not coming out. We must play our part and ensure, not just in our own interests but in the interests of our European partners, that we react constructively.

It is no use the Prime Minister wrapping herself in a union jack and thinking that it is some type of shield to ward off evil.

Nor is it any use if the Scottish National party, whose Members of Parliament are absent today, wraps itself in the tartan flag and thinks that it is some sort of shield that will protect all our people from the ravages of Thatcherism. It is no use, either, making rhetorical statements about the need to defend the steel industry if the SNP does not take part in debates, on the ground that it has a little tartan shawl that it can put on to protect it from the cold and that it will be a shield to ward off all evils. There is more in common between the Treasury Bench and the SNP than one would imagine.

The Government face a great task. They must face up to our economic problems and to future constitutional developments. Everyone knows, however, that they are failing the people of this country. Part of the message was received last night in two constituencies. The sooner we get

[Mr. Hughes]

rid of the Conservative party in every constituency and have a change of Government, the better it will be for us all.

11.10 am

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Crawley): I am grateful for this opportunity to speak in the debate on the Loyal Address. I admire the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) for having changed his views on the European Community. We all have our own views about it. I do not know whether he heard the speech of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen). It was one of the best speeches that I have heard him make. He is a distinguished speaker. He said that at times he despairs at the way in which the country deals with fundamental issues.

I make no comment about what the hon. Gentleman said, but it is extraordinary that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister should have been unable to go into the recent negotiations without the whole hearted support of the House of Commons in order to secure for our people, in difficult circumstances, their rights and the protection of their most fundamental interests. These issues ought not to be trivialised by ordinary cross-party banter.

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Soames: No, I should like to continue with my speech, if I may.

There is considerable agreement on both sides of the House about the issues. We cannot afford to allow ourselves to drift into the extraordinary morass proposed by Mr. Delors. He is an out-and-out federalist. The nation state faces real danger from federalism if it ploughs on regardless and gets sucked into it. We are not prepared to allow that to happen. That does not alter our real desire, as set out by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in the last few days, to play a proper, constructive and creative role in Europe.

Mr. Tony Banks: What is so sacred about the concept of the nation state? The nation state grew out of a series of amalgamations of principalities and kingdoms. Why do we stop at the nation state? Why do we not go further? The hon. Gentleman does not feel that history has suddenly come to a halt, does he?

Mr. Soames: No, I do not, but I believe that the nation state gives character, courage, strength and form to a people. That is not always completely understood by our European partners. Ours is an entirely different experience from theirs. The nation state does matter. I understand what the hon. Gentleman says but I have respectfully to disagree with the inference that he draws.

I welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to his post, and congratulate him on the startlingly splendid start that he has made. He carries with him the good will of the House as he embarks on his important job.

I warmly welcome the fact that the Gracious Speech includes the measures that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport has decided to implement to reform the law relating to the punishment of people who are convicted of drunken driving. In the last few years, two families in my constituency have felt deeply let down by British justice. In the first case, a young man was run down by a drunk driver on a zebra crossing and killed. The criminal was fined £250 and banned from driving for 18 months.

That was a contemptible and disgraceful dispensation of the law. Therefore, I am glad that a new offence, following the recommendations in the North report, is to be created that will carry a mandatory prison sentence of up to five years. It will catch those who are guilty of what is no more and no less than murder. I am delighted that that measure will put right a grave omission in the body of our law. I am sure that the whole House welcomes it.

I am delighted that there is to be legislation to deal with public utilities that dig up our roads, thus causing those of us who have to move around our towns and cities such dreadful inconvenience.

The inter-city services are becoming remarkably good. It is a pleasure to travel on British Rail at its best, although it is a swine to have to travel on it at its worst. At its best, British Rail shows what it can do when it puts its mind to it. Nevertheless, the commuter is still poorly served. My constituents enjoy a better service than those who travel on other lines into London, but even my constituents have to put up with disagreeable conditions. When they reach London, they have to travel on an underground which, even at the most charitable, can only be described as a disgrace.

The Government have invested massively in London Underground and enormous sums are to be invested. Nevertheless, the Government ought to be aware of the deep and abiding resentment of all those who, every day, have to make a very unpleasant and disagreeable trip on the underground. It is not a fit system for a great capital city. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the steps that he is taking to improve it. The Government should be under no delusion, however, as to the seriousness of the system's deficiencies.

I refer also to the airline industry, since Gatwick airport lies within my constituency. I am therefore disappointed that the Queen's Speech contains no reference to that industry. It is a truly British success story. It receives no subsidies, yet it contributes mightily to the British balance of payments. It is regulated by a competition policy that is largely a sham. It does not receive the Government assistance that it needs if it is to fight international competition. The airline industry needs the Government's vigourous and robust support in its fight for access to overseas markets, just as overseas interests are fighting daily to secure access to the United Kingdom market. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is as intimately involved in this issue as the Secretary of State for Transport. Of course they fight our corner.

I hope that the Government are aware of the major commercial battle that is raging in Europe, which will determine whether London will continue to remain Europe's principal gateway for long-haul traffic or be displaced by Paris, Frankfurt or Amsterdam. If London is to preserve its position, our airports must be organised to meet the needs of airlines and their passengers, not as supermarkets and property companies. I shall have something to say about the BAA later in my speech.

If London is to continue to compete with Paris and Frankfurt, passengers must be able to reach the airport in comparable time and comfort. Our competitors are expending huge sums in improving their surface access

systems. It is imperative that, without delay we get on with the Heathrow—Paddington rail link and make getting to the airport a normal journey instead of the obstacle race that it is today.

It is of the highest urgency we extend the link to Liverpool Street, so that the City and the west end are brought within reasonable reach of Heathrow. We must proceed with the construction of terminal 5 at Heathrow, and bring the City airport into fully effective operation. It is quite extraordinary that a capital city of the importance of London does not have a proper, fully integrated helicopter facility linking it with Heathrow and other destinations. Environmental and other considerations must be taken into account, but it is extraordinary that a city of this importance does not have that facility. The decision-making process must be speedy and effective. We must have decisions, not endless procrastination and debate.

Heathrow is a major two-runway airport. Gatwick is a single-runway airport, and I am glad—I say this in the presence of my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport—that the Government have acknowledged that they do not wish to construct another runway at Gatwick, which would be physically impossible. Stanstead is a single-runway airport. If an additional runway is needed early next century, it would be madness to consider a fourth London airport with only one runway.

The more pressing need is for terminal capacity at Heathrow, tied to which is the need for the rail link which is grinding its slow way through the House. That is just the start. Of course we welcome the cross-rail link but what about railway links to the midlands, the north and the west? What about the channel tunnel? Would it not make sense to decide now that we need a rail link from the channel, linking Gatwick and Heathrow with the midlands and the north? Every other major airport in Europe is tied to the network. Paris airport and Amsterdam are on the channel tunnel line. If we are serious about maintaining London's status as the major intercontinental gateway, we must provide the necessary infrastructure and terminal capacity where passengers want it.

Alone in Europe, our industry is completely in the private sector. Our aircraft manufacturers, airlines and airports are all shining examples of the remarkable benefits of privatisation. We are heading towards the single European market, but let us make no mistake: our European partners are also our most serious rivals and competitors.

I pay tribute to the Department of Transport, which has pressed ahead with liberalising measures. Too many European Governments still protect their national carriers from the rigours of international competition, which is bad for the customer and for the airlines. The Government must maintain their pressure on European Governments.

In the presence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, I should like to mention competition with our American friends. They may have invented domestic deregulation, but they are highly protectionist in international aviation. No foreign airline is allowed access to their domestic routes or even meaningful investment in a United States airline. That is a wholly unacceptable state of affairs, and my right hon. Friend will have close regard to the interests of Britain's carriers in the future negotiations on United Airlines' and Pan Am's slots at Heathrow. He will ensure that British interests are properly considered.

I am only a partial fan of the British Airports Authority. Its technical expertise is outstanding, but any organisation that allows people to travel from, and be kept in, the conditions that prevailed at terminal 1 at Heathrow throughout the summer is a disgrace. I hope that my right hon. Friend will consider a possible reference to the Office of Fair Trading or the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to ensure that the British Airports Authority does not abuse what is undoubtedly a monopoly. It is unacceptable that passengers who wish to travel in the United Kingdom are treated like cattle. Much more needs to be done to ensure that our people are properly looked after. The Government are making, and have made, mammoth investment in road building, and there are further substantial increases to hand, but travel on Britain's main roads and motorways, particularly on the M1 and M6, has become a nightmare. In the 1990s, it is unacceptable for people to be stuck for hours on end on a motorway without any information, help or succour while appalling accidents or chemical spillages are sorted out.

The Government must, as a matter of the greatest urgency, secure far greater and better information systems on motorways, which would prevent people from taking slip roads if 10 miles further down the motorway there is a 15-mile queue. That would not be difficult to achieve, it would not be expensive and the Government must act. Transport costs are unacceptably high and traffic delays are totally unnecessary.

I am sorry to have detained the House for so long. We increasingly have, under my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, a much better and more cohesive transport policy. I broadly and wholeheartedly welcome the transport developments in the Queen's Speech and look forward to the swift enactment of the proposed legislation.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Hon. Members will recall that Mr. Speaker said at the commencement of our proceedings that he intended to apply the 10-minute limit on speeches between 11.30 am and 1 pm but that it might be relaxed in the light of progress. Given the progress that we have made, it will be unnecessary for me to invoke the 10-minute limit, but I very much hope that hon. Members will not take this as a licence and will recognise that we shall still need some restraint if every hon. Member who is seeking to catch my eye is to be called.

11.27 am

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I shall endeavour to follow your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The simple messages from the by-election results that are relevant to our debate are that the Government have been seen, first, to be deeply divided on a fundamental issue and, secondly, to be substantially mismanaging the economy. They have lost the confidence of people who have supported them over the past 10 or 12 years. Unless they are prepared to respond to that, they will suffer a humiliating defeat. If they choose to reject the constructive comments of Opposition Members and of people outside, they will pay a high price. They must listen to what people are saying and consider the practical implications.

The Liberal Democrats have always believed in a free-enterprise, market-based economy. We have that in common with the Conservative party, and to some extent

[Mr. Malcolm Bruce]

it divides us from the Labour party. We acknowledge that the Government have a clear responsibility within such an economy to promote investment, research and competition and to regulate monopolies. In that regard, the Government have been conspicuously unsuccessful and unwilling to tackle the problems, possibly because they draw their finances from large companies which benefit from their ability to operate monopolies to their advantage.

We are now witnessing the consequences of a series of mega-mergers that have taken place over the years and that should not, in the interests of competition, have been allowed to go ahead. Scandals have occurred, as we saw in the recent Guinness trials and in the Polly Peck affair. They are the consequences of the climate created by the Government, who have aggravated the situation by their policy of privatising state monopolies with wholly inadequate measures to ensure competition or effective regulation.

The hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) complained about a lack of competition in airline policy. Many people associated with British Caledonian feel bitter about the way in which that issue was handled and about the disgraceful conduct of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which rejigged the whole bid and came out with an approved bid that was different from that which was referred to it in the first place. That was a disgraceful operation, which worked against the interests of the consumer.

I will, as one who flies regularly on British Airways, give two examples of how BA operates in monopoly terms. When I was a new Member of this place, I made representations to the chief executive of BA because the company operated its shuttle services to Glasgow and Edinburgh at mealtimes with no mealtime service. When I remonstrated with the company about that, I was told that I did not know anything about running an airline, that there was no customer demand and that it had no intention of providing such a service. When BA found that British Midland was operating competitively in that area and was offering a mealtime service—and that BA was suffering a major customer haemorrhage—it revamped its whole operation and provided a mealtime service on those runs.

But when I fly from Heathrow to Aberdeen, where there is no competition, I find that, while the catering is reasonably adequate, when, for whatever reason, there is a shortage of aircraft, the tendency is to pull the Aberdeen service rather than those services where BA faces competition.

That means that the last flight to Aberdeen is sometimes withdrawn and Aberdeen passengers are abandoned. The response of BA's chief executive is, "If foreigners are stranded at Heathrow, they have nowhere else to go." Where are Aberdonians supposed to go at Heathrow when they have missed the last flight? They cannot take Air France to Paris. The nub of the issue is that there is no choice and no competition.

The situation has been aggravated not only with airlines but with British Telecom, British Gas, the way in which the electricity industry is being privatised, and with British Steel—which brings me to some remarks of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes). British Steel's current method of operation is a classic example of short-termism in the climate that the Government have created. Without doubt, British Steel is pursuing short-term profits and is sacrificing medium-term and long-term markets. That is against the national interest, and because British Steel can operate as a monopoly in the domestic market—knowing that no other company can move in, so that it can effectively vandalise its own assets if it is not prepared to use them—it can treat the Scottish industry in the way it is currently being treated.

Leaving aside assurances given to the Government and hon. Members, it is clear that British Steel is determined to phase out the entire steel industry in Scotland. The hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) is usually here on these occasions and pours scorn on what he describes as moaning Scots. Our objection to what is being done to the Scottish steel industry is based on the fact that the Ravenscraig operation has been profitable and that it has contributed substantially to British Steel's turnaround in profitability because of the productivity of the work force there, as has been admitted by the chairman of British Steel. Similarly, the Clydesdale tube works is closing simply because of the failure to invest in modern technology to enable the works to compete.

British Steel has an appalling record of abandoning our steel markets to foreign competitors, to the aggravation of our balance of payments and our national market share. We are entitled to expect the Government to intervene on competition grounds and to explore, realistically and actively, the possibility of creating an independent private company to provide British Steel with the competition that it needs and deserves. The Government should test out the possibility of getting proper investment into the Scottish steel industry, possibly with new plants and locations.

The business climate in general affects businesses in every constituency. Although I was not able to spend time in Bradford, I am sure that the responses given were similar to those that I heard in Eastbourne, where many business men and women who had supported the Conservative party said that their enterprises had been crippled by the consequences of the Government's failure to control inflation and of high interest rates.

The state of affairs has been compounded by the uniform business rate, which has been set at the top level of inflation, at 10·9 per cent. If the Chancellor's forecasts of inflation turn out to be correct, what will he do for small businesses that have faced the top levels of inflation and have had to absorb their costs? What consolation can there be for businesses that fail as a result, even though inflation may subsequently be brought under control? They will have failed as a result of being excessively penalised.

The North sea oil and gas industry is of particular concern in my constituency. I have had close though indirect, association with the industry for about 15 years and I have great admiration for the technological achievements of the industry in finding and bringing ashore the oil and gas. About 20,000 of my constituents are employed in the industry, and major oil company operation headquarters are located in my area.

I am concerned over the feeling among those working in the industry about current offshore safety practices. The recent dispute arose from a bubbling over of frustration and resentment. It was not the best way to get the matter resolved, and we do not have a happy situation. We should

not sit back and accept what has occurred. The Government should accept some responsibility and be concerned about the implications of the dispute.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North and I, among others, attended a meeting in Aberdeen recently where we heard some disturbing things from representatives of the workforce. The idea that the oil companies can tell contractors, "We will not allow you to employ, as part of your contract, workers who were involved in the industrial dispute and who refused to leave the platform," is, I argue, secondary action by employers that would be illegal if it were carried out by employees. It is difficult in such circumstances for offshore workers to conduct an industrial dispute or strike in an attempt to bring pressure on an employer.

In the context of yesterday's results by the oil companies, it must be acknowledged that the separation of retailing from production should not readily be accepted as a justification for oil company policies. When I was a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry there was an investigation into petrol retailing, with a reference to the Office of Fair Trading, which declared that there was no malpractice.

That happened because it approached the issue in the wrong way. It accepted the oil companies' argument that petrol retailing was a separate business that lost money, and that that justified the companies passing those losses on to the consumer. But that is to ignore the fact that huge multinational integrated oil companies gain the benefit of windfall wholesaling and production profits. It is wrong to say that consumers must absorb losses on retailing and that producers can pocket the producer profits with no benefit to the consumer.

In those circumstances, when oil companies measure the cost of increased safety in the North sea against the profit background, it is difficult for them to say that they cannot afford such measures. There has to be a cost-competitive recognition of the environment in which the firms operate, but safety cannot be compromised to that extent against the background of those profit levels. I understand that the drop in production in the Brent complex has so worried Shell's partner, Esso, that it is taking a much more direct interest in the management of that field and is concerned about safety and production problems that may arise if the present dispute is not resolved.

My next two points relate to transport issues of direct concern to me. The Government have pursued a policy of responding to increased traffic pressures on the roads by increasing the spending budgets on the roads to the detriment of railways, in particular. That is a mistake, and I do not believe that the Government will solve the fundamental traffic problems in that way. All they will do is attract more cars to create more jams.

Some radical measures may be necessary, and I do not dispute the case for road improvements. I freely admit that I campaigned for some in my constituency, partly because we were neglected when previous investments were made. That was proved by the statistics that the Scottish Office published in response to my questions. It is simply unacceptable for the Government to say that the east coast mainline will effectively stop at Edinburgh and Edinburgh to Aberdeen will be treated as a branch line, which cannot justify the investment if it cannot prove an 8 per cent. rate of return.

Leaving aside the correct estimate of return, which seems marginal, either the London-Aberdeen route is the arterial rail line of the United Kingdom or it is not. Clearly, the decision taken by British Rail and supported by the Government is that it is not, which we find unacceptable.

The Minister for Public Transport may want to argue that strict criteria of economic return are applied to British Rail, but there are also strict criteria on how road developments and improvements are calculated. If he checks with the Scottish Office, he will find that the decision to upgrade the A74 to motorway status does not meet those criteria. I am not opposed to that upgrading, but a clear political decision was taken by the Government because they believed that they had to respond, and the same political decision should be taken on the Aberdeen-Edinburgh electrification link.

The quality of service between Aberdeen and Inverness is appalling. The frequency of service on routes south of Aberdeen is inadequate and indicative of the rundown planned by British Rail. Only yesterday, we heard that another London service is to be diverted to Poole. Apparently there is a great demand for travel from Aberdeen to Poole—I do not believe it, I think that the traffic is south of Aberdeen. We also lost one sleeper earlier this year. Those attitudes are simply disastrous for the economic infrastructure of districts such as the north-east of Scotland.

The signs are that rail freight will effectively disappear from the north-east of Scotland once the present review is completed. I spoke to representatives from a paper mill in my constituency that at present imports chalk by rail from English China Clays. They said that, if the rail freight service is discontinued, they will import the chalk, and English China Clays will lose the business. That is the sort of consequence we face. If we are to talk about a single market, those of us in the north-east of Scotland, representing districts with a great record of successful exports to the continent, are entitled to be part of the national and international network. The Government's failure to recognise that will be strongly held against them. It is not in the interests of the local or national economy for them to behave in that way. I urge them to recognise the strength of feeling being expressed and their responsibility to respond.

11.44 am

Mr. Gerrard Neale (Cornwall, North): In the absence of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown), I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his sterling performance and generous remarks about the Opposition. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East, who used every opportunity to exploit the position held by any Opposition spokesman at present. He reminded me of one of my constituents, who I am sure would have said, "I admire that Mr. Brown. He tells me what he is going to tell me, and tells me, then he tells me what he told me, but the trouble is, he never tells me what it will cost." The hon. Gentleman's speech was littered with examples of how one can pull down the country and criticise it in a range of ways without costing any of the

[Mr. Gerrard Neale]

measures. His proposals would have led to a remarkably inflationary economy way beyond what we have now, had they been enacted.

In the hon. Gentleman's absence, I suggest that if he looks back at the period up to 1979, when the Labour party was in power, he will see the adverse effects that regional aid had on the west country, and how vast sums were spent to try to persuade companies to come to Cornwall that would not otherwise have come because of the economic disadvantages for those companies. They were advised to go against economic and financial sense and, as a result, there were several dramatic collapses that ruined the lives of many people who were drawn into companies that should never have been set up in Cornwall in the first place.

Since 1979 there has been a dramatic increase in investment in roads and infrastructure by the Government. That has provided a real attraction for industry to come to Cornwall and many more companies have set up down there. It has led to much greater employment and had a beneficial effect on wages for local people who have had to compete for labour. It has been splendid news for the county. I spoke in exactly the same terms when I made my maiden speech in 1979; regional aid can have a distorting influence on a district such as Cornwall and will not benefit it.

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan) *rose*——

Mr. Neale: For the Opposition to press the case as they do is to ignore the practical implications that companies and businesses consider when they are looking to set up in constituencies and districts such as mine.

Mr. Prescott: I dispute the hon. Gentleman's argument about regional funds. I wish to give an example that is relevant to transport. The public subsidies of the section 8 grant were used in an innovative way for the china clay business. The subsidies were used not only for the rail lines but to provide wagons, which sustained the china clay business because it allowed the clay to be taken to Scotland by rail. That is good not only for jobs in Cornwall, but for the country and the environment. Does not the hon. Gentleman agree that that is a profitable use of public money?

Mr. Neale: The great majority of china clay produced by English China Clays in Cornwall is exported by ship. Much of it is taken to various ports serving the country. The hon. Gentleman must address the fact that if there is a marginal loss in any business—British Rail should be no exception—and it has a number of diversified activities, it should consider whether to bear one marginal loss against profit in other sectors. The hon.Gentleman should know —if he does not, he should look at the figures—that British Rail's freight transport is in a desperate state in terms of the loss that it sustains. Any Government and the board of British Rail must address that problem.

In the autumn statement yesterday the Government gave the welcome news that they are increasing investment in British Rail and roads. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) said, when service on British Rail is good, which it often is, it is exceptionally good. Only a few days ago I had cause to travel from Euston. The station is in excellent order: it is clean and attractive. My trains left and arrived on time in both directions. I must say that I was rather startled at British Rail's generosity, however. I should hate it to be thought that I travelled without a ticket, but I certainly succeeded in travelling in both directions without my ticket being inspected at any point. I arrived with it intact.

I wish to address one angle of road safety, which is road use. I echo the plea made to the Secretary of State by my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley concerning information systems on motorways because that is an exceptionally important matter. I also wish to highlight the frustration that arises from long delays caused by coning in areas where only one or two people or perhaps none are working. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is extremely diligent in those matters and I would ask him also to bear in mind the problems that arise when contractors who have taken steps to remove cones during periods of heavy traffic nevertheless leave the signs in place. All the traffic then slows down, only to find that there is in fact no hold-up. I use the motorway system a great deal. I usually travel by car to my constituency in the west country and I know that there is a whole range of ways in which the use of our motorway system could be greatly improved. The removal of such signs is one of them.

I understand that is is intended to introduce much stiffer penalties for overtaking on the inside on motorways, which is a very dangerous manoeuvre. But I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will examine the reasons why motorists do that. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley suggested, it is largely because of the lack of information and guidance telling them to stay on the inside unless they are in the process of overtaking.

The Minister for Public Transport (Mr. Roger Freeman): My hon. Friend has been kind enough to inform me that he has to catch a train to his constituency and may not be able to stay for the whole debate. The Government agree not only with him but with my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) about motorway information services. The road traffic Bill that we hope to present shortly will contain specific provisions to deal with that matter. We intend to take clear action to ensure that motorists are aware of problems that may arise later in their journey so that they can take avoiding action.

Mr. Neale: I am sure that hon. Members and motor vehicle users alike will welcome such provisions with open arms. They will be very useful.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): As a regular motorway user himself, the hon. Gentleman will no doubt share my hope that the illuminated signs on motorways, which often give incorrect information, are made to give the correct information of which motorists can then take note.

Mr. Neale: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point and I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will take it on board. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who has also been involved in these matters and who has dealt with them very ably, will confirm that it is not always as easy as it sounds to provide information systems, although a great deal could be done to improve them.

The Gracious Speech contained some welcome news about transport matters, including the proposal that we should go out to the private sector for the construction and

operation of toll roads and motorways. I have long felt that that is the direction that we should take, especially where there is gross overcrowding on the existing motorway network. The opportunity is there for the private sector to play a part. But before the publication of that Bill and, linked with it, the planning Bill, there are two or three points on which I wish to caution my hon. Friend the Minister. I hope that he will be able to address them now if he had not done so in the Bill.

It is intended that there should be some form of competition in respect of the schemes and that the contenders should produce plans for them. That is understandable but I suggest that, unless the brief is very clear, some major contractors will say, "We have a one-in-four chance of success. The cost of producing the plans is too high for us to entertain so we shall sit this one out." My hon. Friend must either limit greatly the number of contenders whom he approaches in respect of a scheme or he must be careful to explain exactly what the Department is looking for, to cut the cost of preparing the design.

I hope that my hon. Friend has clear guidelines in mind to deal with the question of development gain. If private operators are to produce competitive road schemes and if charges to the consumer are to be kept down, much will depend on what the operators can do with the land adjoining the motorway or road that they are constructing. That gives rise to questions of planning and compulsory purchase.

We must examine carefully the planning inquiry system in so far as it relates to our infrastructure projects. I happen to think that we should look at the system in respect of all our major projects, including power stations or whatever. We need a public inquiry system that requires local authorities and all interested groups to make submissions to an inquiry and under which that inquiry's decision is final. Without that, we shall not succeed in encouraging people in the private sector to move into such schemes. If private operators know that they must go through the public inquiry system and the planning permission system, with all that that entails in terms of the length of time involved, there will be little to attract them.

Toll roads and private sector involvement are an excellent idea and it is courageous of the Government, and of Transport Ministers in particular, to propose such a scheme. If Ministers deal with those points—among the other points that I know they have in mind—there is every chance of the proposal producing more investment and better road systems for our motor vehicle users.

11.58 am

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Let me start by commenting on the welcome remarks of the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) about British airports. For a long time now, I have been campaigning for the improvement of provincial and regional airports. In particular, we have been campaigning for some time for an adequate road and rail link to the Cardiff Wales airport to serve the community and the local economy. I am glad to say that that is shortly to be the subject of an evidence-taking exercise by the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs. I hope that, during that exercise, we shall be able to give the matter a thorough airing, so there is no need for me to raise the subject in today's debate.

I welcome the measures on road safety in the Gracious Speech. I was delighted to see that the Government propose tougher measures against offending drivers, particularly drunk drivers. That is overdue. The Government should be congratulated on taking measures in that connection. I am also delighted that we shall make use of new technology to detect offences on our roads. That is to be welcomed.

We should remember that increasing the punishments alone will not necessarily result in large improvements. We must change attitudes to driving, especially drinking and driving, which causes terrible carnage on our roads. But that should be balanced with improved detection. We already have stiff penalties, but we have not seen a continued dramatic improvement in driving standards. Therefore, I and many other people were disappointed not to see a reference in the Gracious Speech to introducing controlled random breath tests. I hope that the Minister will comment on that at some stage.

The record on road accidents in Britain is bad. I am informed that, during the five hours of today's debate alone, 350 people will be seriously injured or killed on our roads. Over 5,000 people were killed and roughly 350,000 were injured on our roads last year. The House may be surprised to hear—it is a feather in the British cap—that even that bad record is one of the best in Europe. We have a comparative road safety record to be proud of although, there is a fly in the ointment. Our record on accidents involving pedestrians and children is not good. However, overall road safety in Britain is good compared to other European countries. There is room for enormous improvement, and random breath tests are one measure that we could take. We know from experience in other countries that they work.

We should also commend the Department of Transport for setting its laudable target of reducing the accident rate by 30 per cent. by the year 2000. Many hon. Members will agree that we must take measures soon to ensure that the target is realised. Several effective, low-cost measures could greatly assist us in achieving the target, one of which would cost nothing. An early-day motion supported by over 100 hon. Members from both sides of the House supports the early introduction of draft regulations in the current Session to make wearing rear seat belts compulsory for adults.

That would prove an exceptionally effective method of reducing death and injury on our roads, particularly the horrifying injuries which result when adults are catapulted from the back seats of cars. The introduction of front seat belts had a dramatic effect and the introduction of compulsory wearing of rear seat belts for children under 14 will have a dramatic effect. Once again, the evidence from other countries suggests that the wearing of rear seat belts by adults can greatly reduce accidents.

It is worth bearing in mind that each road death in Britain was recently estimated to cost the community £0·5 million in health costs, emergency services and support for the family of the deceased. Forgetting about the human misery that can be caused, the cost-effectiveness of reducing the number of road accidents is demonstrated by the cost to the community—currently about £6 billion a year. That is the price we pay for the toll of death and injury on our roads.

A second measure would be effective. We hope that the Department of Transport will make a statement shortly on the amount of money that it intends to allocate to local

[Mr. John P. Smith]

safety schemes such as small engineering road schemes which have a superb track record in reducing accidents. They include improving lighting and sometimes merely a spot of paint on a street corner gives a warning. Such schemes also include pedestrian crossings, and so on. We know that the Government have a commitment in principle to such schemes but we should like to hear how much will be allocated. We hope that it will be adequate.

We are making progress on road safety compared with our European counterparts, but many hon. Members will be disappointed that there was no reference in the Gracious Speech to other forms of transport, and to transport safety in particular. There was no mention of aviation or our not-so-good record on railway safety. Compared to many of our European counterparts, our record on railway safety is not good; and this year, it was particularly bad. The month of August was the worst month ever for train accidents involving large numbers of casualties.

Many hon. Members will be disappointed that there was no reference in the Gracious Speech to resolving the dilemma that seems to have emerged in British law which does not allow us to allocate corporate responsibility for the dreadful neglect of safety standards, particularly in public transport. Cases collapsed recently when no corporate responsibility could be placed on those who owned or managed large companies which appeared to be responsible for dreadful disasters which had caused death and destruction.

After the Clapham crash, there was no attempt to place corporate responsibility on British Rail or those responsible for financing British Rail. Yet this year, history was made when a train driver, Mr. Robert Morgan, was sentenced to six months in gaol—18 months, with 12 months suspended. The sentence was later reduced by the Court of Appeal. It was the first time ever that a British train driver had been given a custodial sentence for overshooting a red light—which he courageously admitted —when he was neither drunk nor proven to be acting in an absolutely reckless manner. It was a mystery to some of us why Mr. Morgan pleaded guilty to manslaughter. Anyone like me who has driven in the front of a locomotive and seen the nature of a train driver's job will know that it is tedious and boring. Drivers shoot through warning signs and yellow signs and knock off the Klaxon that comes on in the cab almost instinctively and automatically.

From my limited experience I can see how easy it is for someone to make a mistake That man made a mistake —no one seeks to deny it—in the course of his work, which destroyed his life and affected his family. He paid a high penalty for that one mistake. The house should carefully consider an anomaly. In most other European countries, such an incident and error could not have happened, because fail-safe devices have been introduced which prevent the ludicrous possibility of somone overshooting a red light through an error of judgment. A driver of a forward moving train has 250 yards in which to stop it before it cuts across a main line carrying a 90 mph express. Practically every other railway system in western Europe would have a fail-safe emergency stop in such a situation. The driver took the train through one warning light without slowing down, through a second yellow warning light without slowing down, because of the tedium of the job or whatever, and then through a red light. The train could not have stopped in time at that point, because it was going too fast.

Such accidents should not be allowed to happen. We should have a system of rail safety that ensures that, when human fallibility comes into the equation and honest and decent people make mistakes in their work, those errors do not result in carnage and disaster—as they did on that occasion, and may do again. We should remember that, after Mr. Robert Morgan was charged with manslaughter, the number of accidents and incidents over the following year increased dramatically in British Rail.

Passing such a sentence on a person like that smacks of making a scapegoat of him. Any objective analysis of the circumstances leading up to the incident can only lead one to that conclusion. I do not blame the judge or the court, because Mr. Morgan pleaded guilty to manslaughter, although I find it hard to believe that he should have done so. One person has been made a scapegoat when public transport in general and British Rail in particular have a record of falling way behind our European counterparts in safety.

Many of us would have liked to see something in the Gracious Speech about introducing corporate responsibility into the law and ensuring that it is applied effectively. We should also introduce statutory regulations so that British Rail has responsibility to ensure that the fail-safe mechanisms used in other countries are introduced.

Mr. Freeman: The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that safety measures and expenditure on safety, while tremendously important, are not subjects appropriate for the Gracious Speech. The day after the speech was made, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, in his Autumn Statement, made it clear, as did my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, that British Rail and London Underground would be spending £700 million over the next three years on safety measures.

Mr. Smith: I am delighted to hear that. I hope that the Government will set down some guidelines for British Rail to ensure that it updates its railway network, so that safety is an integral part of it and that human error does not result in disasters such as those that we have seen recently.

12.12 pm

Mr. Richard Tracey (Surbiton): I shall concentrate most of my remarks on the transport section of the Gracious Speech and particularly on how it relates to the London area and my constituency. However, in more general terms, I welcome the balanced and interesting programme of proposed legislation, with 15 major Bills, which I am sure will also be welcomed by the public. The Bill dealing with criminal justice contains provision for much heavier sentences for serious crimes, particularly rape—a crime that we all abhor.

I also welcome the greater local emphasis on planning that will be brought about by the planning and compensation Bill, which we look forward to seeing soon. The social security measures, particularly those dealing with enforcement of maintenance for children and deserted spouses, will be welcomed. There is much to be welcomed in the sections in the Gracious Speech dealing with education and measures to tidy up various lacunae in the community charge legislation passed a couple of years ago.

The section on transport will be particularly welcomed in London and in my constituency—the road traffic Bill and the highways Bill very much so. The highways Bill has provisions for dealing with those most awkward and repetitive holes in the road caused by works conducted by public utilities. I am pleased to see that my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) is here. When he was Minister for Roads and Traffic I wrote to him about a most appalling traffic jam, which stretched for five miles from a hole that had been dug somewhere on the Wandsworth one-way system, along the whole of the A3 and into the royal borough of Kingston upon Thames, thereby inconveniencing my constituents. That was the most ludicrous and avoidable traffic jam.

My hon. Friend told me—this must be a couple of years ago—that the Government proposed to deal with that sort of incident. At last, time has been found in the legislative programme for a highways Bill, which deals with a great deal more than just this. I am sure that there is agreement on both sides of the House about how regrettable it is that public utilities are prepared to behave in this way. The road is dug up one day to deal with an electricity problem, the tarmac is put back, and then two or three days later it is dug up by the gas board and then put back again and, if we are unlucky, it will then be dug up yet again by the telephone engineers. That is ludicrous, and the Government are right to tackle the problem.

I also welcome the provision, set out in the briefing material that has come our way, that, when the carriageway is reinstated it will have to be reinstated in the safest possible form. The number of cyclists is growing, and that is good. Not only do they improve their health, but because they are using bicycles instead of cars, they reduce congestion and lead pollution. If we want to encourage cyclists, we must make it safer for them to ride on the carriageways, so this provision is welcome.

Congestion is a problem in central and inner London. The road traffic Bill will make provision for what are called the red routes. I am one of the first to welcome the idea of removing illegal parkers and tightening the law to prevent illegal parking. I am glad to see it happening in central London, and I understand that my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis), who unfortunately cannot be here today, is credited with much of the campaigning to persuade the Government that the red route solution is the best way forward. My hon. Friend is right: this will be a way to prevent parking that holds up the passage of buses, creates congestion, prevents efficient deliveries and so on.

However, I was alarmed, as were hundreds of my constituents, to see that the red route network as originally planned in the consultation document stretched out into my constituency, and the edge of London, and took in the A243, which runs from the M25 intersection up to Hook at the intersection of the A243 and the A3. It is not a road on which there are constant problems from illegal parking. The problem is simply that the road carries too much traffic. Motorists who are travelling on the M25 see the intersection as an opportunity to nip along the A243, through urban areas, a village and urban area in my constituency and past green fields, to arrive at the A3. The problem is one of volume; there is rarely excessive parking on the road.

When the red route idea was first mooted, my constituents and I rose up in arms. A public meeting was held and the doors had to be closed because so many attended to criticise the proposal. Since then, I have passed on hundreds of letters to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport from my constituents in Chessington about this matter. The idea seems, however, to remain in the Government's proposals. I accept that my right hon. Friend told me that there will be full consultation with my constituents in Chessington before the idea is taken any further, but I hope that, as a result of that consultation, he will drop this part of the red route proposals, which is so far out of London, so far out of the congested centre of London and so much on the edge of the conurbation. Red routing is not the most appropriate policy to pursue in such an area.

Hundreds of my constituents wish me to put that reservation on record. For the population of inner London or central London, however, red routes have not come too soon. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will ensure that the London traffic director will make certain that removal squads take away illegally parked vehicles from main roads where they are causing congestion and that, to increase their productivity, they do not nip round the back streets and remove the vehicles that are not causing congestion.

Mr. Tony Banks: If there is proper policing of the red route scheme, vehicles will be forced off main roads into many side streets, which are residential. The scheme will merely shift the problem somewhere else. More co-ordinated attempts must be made to deal with the problems of London's traffic, rather than coming up with one idea which, in my opinion, will only shift the problem somewhere else.

Mr. Tracey: I am in considerable agreement with the hon. Gentleman. Surely the traffic director will be the man who must mastermind the implementation of the various schemes proposed. From what I have seen of the provisions in the Bill, wardens will be provided with extra powers to clamp and to initiate removal where vehicles are causing considerable problems.

As I was saying, vehicles must be removed primarily from main routes. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) has campaigned with many of us who represent London constituencies—this has been a cross-party effort—to free main roads for buses. We must take that further if we are to encourage people to use bus services. They will not use them if it means sitting in a constant traffic jam.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) said, our main-line railway services are extremely good. I travelled on the railway in France during the summer and I can say that many of our services are up to the same standard as, or are even better, than, many services in France. During the summer, I encountered several delays while using French trains, which are so often presented to us as a perfect example of rail transport. Our main-line services are fine, and it is the suburban services to which I wish to draw attention.

In the south-west of London and in Surrey, within Network SouthEast, British Rail has taken the extraordinary line that it has removed services to improve efficiency. That information was received with much derision by my constituents and those of about a dozen of my Conservative colleagues who represent constituencies in the south-west of London and in Surrey. We have since been raising the matter with British Rail's management.

[Mr. Tracey]

The Government are making the greatest investment for 29 or 30 years in British Rail. As that investment is being made, we wish to see services managed in the best possible way. In the past two or three months, services on the Chessington line, which runs through my constituency, through Tolworth, have been reduced by the removal of 23 trains. That is unacceptable.

Some of the 23 services have been reinstated. We were told by British Rail that they would all be reinstated by the beginning of October, but I understand that there is a problem in training drivers and rail crews generally, as well as some recruitment problems. However, when we are making record investment in railway services on Network SouthEast, we expect the management to make certain that our constituents have the most efficient service they can expect. If we are to reduce congestion and remove unnecessary car travellers from the roads, travellers should be encouraged by a high standard of efficiency to use the railway or to opt for bus services. We shall not do that by removing services as an alleged means of improving efficiency.

12.27 pm

Dr. Dafydd Elis Thomas (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): I shall not take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) on the details of inner London's traffic problems. All of us who visit this great metropolis in the course of parliamentary duties have a personal interest, especially in clamping and parking problems. We are also interested in commuting and in tube networks.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) referred to the position of the Scottish National party on the steel industry. He alleged that it is similar to that of the Conservative party. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the private notice question on the Clydesdale steel works. If he reads *Hansard*, he will see that my hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), the leader of the SNP, was criticised by the Secretary of State for Scotland for having policies which he described as wanting

"the steel industry to be controlled by Governments and by the state."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1990; vol. 180, c. 115.]

There is a substantial divergence between the policy of the Conservative party and that of the SNP. Perhaps the problem is that Labour party policy on the public sector aspect of the British steel industry is similar to that of the Conservative party.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I want to set the record straight. I did not say that their policy on the steel industry was the same. I said that the Government wrap themselves in the Union Jack and pretend that that solves all the problems, and that the SNP wraps itself in a tartan cloak and thinks that that solves all the problems. On the one hand there are little Englanders, and on the other little Scotlanders.

Dr. Thomas: I do not want to be drawn too much further on this point. As I understand SNP policy, it also wraps itself in the flag of the European Community. Its policy on independence in Europe advocates direct relations between Scotland and the European Community.

Mr. McAvoy: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that if the SNP really wanted to put the case for the Scottish steel industry, it would have a spokesman in the Chamber today?

Dr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman is well aware that the SNP and Plaid Cymru have a fraternal relationship, and that in debates such as this we rotate as a joint parliamentary group. That facilitates both our position and that of the Chair. I do not speak on behalf of the SNP about the state of the Scottish steel industry; it would not be for me to do so as I come from a country whose steelmaking capacity has been largely retained.

I wish to devote my remarks to the major issue raised by the Secretary of State when he opened the debate, which is the Uruguay round, the multilateral trade agreement and, especially, the implications of GATT for the major industry that affects 80 per cent. of the land mass of the United Kingdom—agriculture and forestry. It is a basic industry, and the policies that affect it have implications not only for food processing and consumption but for the shape of the environment in the hill and other areas throughout the counties of Britain. It also has important implications for the rural economy and the structure of the countryside.

Those matters have so far been neglected in the debate on the Uruguay round, which has concentrated mainly on the free market emphasis of the Government's policy. The Government support, or at least are moving towards supporting, the American position on the amount of agricultural support cuts that they believe to be necessary. They have pioneered an attitude in the European Community negotiations that is rather different from the less pioneering and less innovative attitude that they have shown in other policy areas. In this area, the United Kingdom is communautaire par excellence, whereas in other areas it is lagging behind. The Government's line is that they are taking the lead in a policy to reduce agricultural support, liberate markets and promote free trade. They have entered the Uruguay round with a position similar to that of the United States.

The agriculture industry and the socio-economic implications of agricultural support have been left to the French and German Agriculture Ministers. They have argued, in protracted discussions, about the socio-economic impact of any reductions that the Government want to make. The publicity from the Government, the Community and the Commission following the final agreement among farm Ministers does not clearly state the implications of an overall 30 per cent. cut in agricultural support for the sectors in each part of the agriculture industry, and especially the implications for the overall income in the hill, livestock and other sectors.

I speak mainly for the sort of agriculture that takes place in the part of the world that I know best and the hill farming area in which I live and work when I am not here. Our concern is that the decisons about agricultural support cuts have been taken without proper consideration of the implications. That was made clear at a meeting that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Mr. Jones) had with officials of the agriculture directorate of the Commission. The figure discussed by Ministers was based on global support and there was no analysis of sector implications.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in response to my intervention, repeated a point made by the

Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food after the agreement was concluded—that the reduction of 30 per cent. was across the board and backdated to 1986, so that the actual reduction would not be substantial. There has been a significant increase in the sheep flock since 1986, and certainly in the CAP expenditure on the sheep meat sector, so a 30 per cent. cut backdated to 1986 could be the equivalent of a 50 per cent. cut.

We have been told that there might be an overall cut of just under 5 per cent. in the livestock sector generally. I want to put that in the context of farmers' incomes. In the United Kingdom as a whole, they have already suffered a substantial decline of nearly 10 per cent. in real terms—after allowing for inflation—since the early 1980s. Over that same period, there has been a 30 per cent. decrease in employment and a major cut in investment. A recent study by agriculture economics experts at Aberystwyth university college showed that 50 per cent. of Welsh farmers have an income of £10,000 a year or less, which clearly shows that the industry cannot tolerate a further reduction in incomes.

What are the implications for the livestock sector following the crises that confronted it this year? I refer to the much-publicised conflict with French lamb producers, low market prices in the late summer and early autumn, the dislocation in transferring from the sheep variable premium to the annual premium, the knock-on effect of bovine spongiform encephalopathy on interchangeable meat such as lamb, the droughts in both France and Britain, and the problems of feeding in the United Kingdom. All those factors squeezing through together, combined with the effects of high interest rates on agriculture and all other industries, may imply further reductions in farm incomes as a consequence of the latest GATT round. What policies will the Government and the Community follow to maintain farmers' incomes in that situation?

Whatever arguments there may be for reducing export subsidies and for liberalising agricultural trade worldwide, the arguments remain for maintaining the already low incomes of hill farmers. Neither the Government nor anyone else in the Community has responded to the problem.

The Agriculture Commissioner, Mr. MacSharry, made the general statement that no reductions in incomes will result from the Uruguay round, but how is that pledge to be fulfilled by the Commission and member states? What attitude will the Government take in further negotiations on reforming the CAP? Reference is clearly made to that in the Gracious Speech, in the context of the Uruguay round. I accept some of the criticisms made today about the direction in which agricultural support is going and how little of it reaches the farm gate and producers themselves, but we must have assurances that farmers' incomes and livelihoods will not be adversely affected, after the crises they have already faced this year, by further cuts—led by a Government who are so committed to free market forces and to reducing public expenditure.

There is an important link between that and the rest of the Government's policies. They cannot favour enterprise generally, yet denude the countryside of the same opportunity—which the existing fabric of farming, by diversifying into other industries and services, can exploit.

Similarly, if the Government have green policies, it makes no sense to have national parks but not to have enough sheep to graze them so that they continue to look the way they do now. It makes no sense not to maintain the fabric of the countryside, such as dry stone walls, which is maintained by agriculture. A green policy requires an agricultural policy, and the maintenance of the countryside's economy and society. It requires 80 or 90 per cent. of land to be farmed in an attractive and ecologically sound way.

For those reasons, farming organisations such as the Farmers Union of Wales and the National Farmers Union welcome the Government's extensification proposals to reduce stocking rates. They welcome the strong environmental component in the hill livestock compensatory allowance and are looking forward to strengthening that component in discussions on the allowance, but there must be a balance between the environmental objectives of agriculture and the maintenance of viable production units through an end price, albeit at a lower level of production, which will give incentives, especially to the young farmer, to produce quality stock through good breeding practices and effective use of land.

This is a good time for the Government to take stock of agriculture in relation to the fabric of rural society and in the context of European Community proposals, and the Commission's document on the future of rural society, which was published in 1988. It is important for the Community to ensure that the overall objectives on GATT and free trade do not cut across its declared socio-economic objectives for rural society, as set out in that document.

The Government have an opportunity to show concern. I am well aware that they have emphasised the role of free market forces and have difficulty relating to subsidies or maintaining a market through planning and ensuring supply mechanisms which control the level of production. However, in agriculture a free market cannot operate in the interests of the countryside, the farming community, consumers or the maintenance of the environment. For those reasons, the Government have to ensure that their agricultural policy is not dominated by free market thinking.

The responses that I have so far received from Ministers to questions on this issue have not been satisfactory. I assure the House and Agriculture Ministers from various parts of the Kingdom who may read the report of this debate that we shall pursue this matter until we have a clear response from the Government about their intention to maintain the fabric of rural society and our agricultural industry and not to allow free market philosophy to turn our countryside into a desert.

12.42 pm

Sir William Shelton (Streatham): I represent an inner London constituency, and like my hon. Friend the Member for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey), who represents an outer London seat, I welcome the emphasis given to transport in the autumn statement. In a recent press release I learnt that total investment will rise to nearly £16 billion over the next three years, which is an increase of £1·5 billion over last year.

Like other Conservative Members, I have sometimes been confronted at public meetings with the statement that the Department of Transport is run by the road lobby. The hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) mentioned that. I was so incensed as a result of a recent meeting that I asked a parliamentary question in July about Government

[Sir William Shelton]

investment in public transport and, with the help of the House of Commons Library statistical section, I got some interesting answers, which I shall reveal to the House.

At 1990-91 prices, the annual average spent by the Labour Government from 1974 to 1979 was £1,084 million. The annual average for the Conservative Government in the past 10 years is £1,021 million. Rightly or wrongly—I am not making any judgments—the Conservative Government have spent less than did the previous Labour Government on roads. Regrettably, they also spent less on British Rail. Labour spent an annual average of £629 million; the Conservatives have spent £566 million. However, as a London Member, I am delighted to say that this Government spent much more on London Underground: the Labour Government, between 1974 and 1979, spent an annual average of £147 million, while the Conservative Government have spent £220 million.

Mr. John P. Smith: I am very glad that the hon. Gentleman has drawn these facts to our attention; however, he is talking in cash terms.

Sir William Shelton: No, I am not.

Mr. Smith: I do apologise.

Sir William Shelton: Let me say again that these are 1990-91 prices. The statistical section in the Library—to which I owe a great debt—worked out the figures for me: I could not possibly have done it myself.

The Department of Transport's predictions for spending on roads in England in 1990-93 show an increase in spending from £1,021 million to £1,755 million on an annual average—up by two thirds. British Rail spending is forecast to increase from £566 million to £1,188 million —to double, at constant prices. The figure for London Underground warms my heart: an annual average of £220 million is forecast to increase to £658 million—up three times.

This brings me to what—as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will know—is one of my most earnest desires: to bring the Northern line to Streatham. That proposal was in the recommendations of the consultants, and I hope that, with such a vast increase in spending, it will not be long before my right hon. Friend can make an announcement. Earlier this year I had a helpful meeting with Mr. Tunnicliffe, the managing director of London Underground. What he told me at the time made sense. He said that it would not be possible to take on any new clients—for instance, to build the extension to Streatham —until we had reduced the congestion in the centre. We can all understand that, especially as the Northern line would be involved. That is why I welcome so much my right hon. Friend's statement about the funding of the east-west cross route and the safeguarding of the Hackney-Chelsea north-south route. I hope that my right hon. Friend agrees that that will reduce congestion, thus opening the door for the arrival of the Northern line in Streatham.

I had some discussions with a helpful British Rail underground executive, who told me that, after those two massive tasks had been undertaken, Streatham would rank equal third with something else—although he refused to tell me what that was. He did tell me that the feasibility study on bringing the line through to Streatham and on to Crystal Palace—I would prefer Croydon, but I would settle for Crystal Palace—was being updated, and would be ready by the end of this year. I shall await the end of the year with great interest, hoping for a Christmas present.

I cannot accept that limitations should be placed on the use of the motor car—except, perhaps, in 20 or even 50 years' time—but, for environmental reasons, we must provide a better choice of public service transport. I cannot stress that too strongly. The way to stop people using their cars is to give them jolly good underground and bus services. If my right hon. Friend comes to Streatham and sees all the cars travelling both north and south—whose panting owners wish that they were on the underground—I am sure that he will meet my most earnest wishes.

Let me now take the opportunity to raise some urgent local issues—of great interest to Streatham, although I fear that they are of less interest to other hon. Members. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport made his excellent decision not to proceed with road building plans in my constituency, the junction improvements and road widenings that were also contained in the recommendations were left in limbo. Consequently, Lambeth council, rightly or wrongly, has served blight notices on all the houses within 200m of the south circular and the A23 through Streatham. This has caused deep consternation and great concern to many of my constituents.

I wrote to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Mr. Atkins) in July when he was a Minister in the Department and asked him to resolve the matter quickly. I shall not conceal the fact that I have received no reply to my letter. Since then I have telephoned the office of my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope), but I have still had no reply. The matter is urgent. I hope that it will be dealt with soon.

I wrote also about a proposal for a development line down Streatham high road. This may hinder the rebuilding of Pratts, our most famous store, which has closed. Again, I have received no reply.

I understand that the Department of Transport advised Lambeth council in April that it is to end the agency agreement whereby Lambeth carried out work for the Department. The Department will carry it out directly. I have no view about that; I heard about it only indirectly. Nevertheless, I hope that consultations will take place. But the Department's wish to close the gaps in the central reservation down Streatham high road is causing consternation. In due course I shall write to the Minister about it and let him know the views of some of my constituents, to which I am sure he will pay attention.

I welcome the autumn statement. I welcome also what my right hon. Friend said about the east-west cross route and the north-south route. Once again, I ask him to ensure that an underground line to Streatham is constructed.

12.51 pm

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Glasgow, Rutherglen): I make no apology for returning to economic and industrial matters. The Government have failed in their duty. Although they benefited from North sea oil revenues and from the privatisation of the nation's publicly owned assets, the country faces a recession, though the Chancellor dares not speak its name. So much for the Government's economic miracle. The latest verdict on

their economic miracle was given during the early hours of this morning. I refer to the by-election results in Bradford, North and Bootle. We look forward to that verdict being repeated in the by-elections at Paisley.

The Government's economic miracle is based on fraud. They try desperately to convince us that they are in control of the economy. Nothing could be further from the truth. Past Conservative Governments had integrity and standing, but the present Government lack both those attributes. For example, on the last day of the Labour party conference the Government announced a major new economic policy. It was a desperate attempt to steal the headlines and make a party political point. Moreover, the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) revealed that for five years he had urged the Cabinet to agree to entry into the exchange rate mechanism. The Government's economic miracle is also shown to be a sham on account of the resignation from the Government of the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe). His resignation was due to a split over a particularly important issue. These are not party political points but signs that the economy is adrift. The Government are cornered and are struggling, but they do not know what to do. They have no strategy or philosophy, and the country is paying the price.

A series of economic indicators show that the Government are in trouble. They promised to pursue firm financial policies designed to reduce inflation and facilitate the growth of employment. What have they delivered? They have delivered a recession. Inflation is 10·9 per cent., unemployment has risen for six consecutive months and there is a current account trade deficit. If a Labour Government were running a fraction of the current trade deficit, there would be gloom and doom in all the financial papers and much talk about Labour's so-called economic incompetence.

The current account deficit for 1989 was £19·1 billion. The Chancellor's forecasts show that our trade is badly out of balance. I have noticed recently that many Conservative Members quote various economic indicators from 1981 to date. They conveniently omit the two years between 1979 and 1981, when the Government destroyed our manufacturing base, and we have never recovered from that. It is a problem that will take a long time to correct, and there is no sign that the Government will do so.

Unemployment is rising fast, inflation is high and, as if that were not bad enough, investment is falling and output is stagnating. A recent CBI survey showed that business confidence is at its lowest for 10 or 11 years, and that the rate of investment is at its lowest for many years. Manufacturing investment in the second quarter of 1990 was lower than in the previous quarter. We are in recession, but the Government do not seem to be taking any action to rectify it.

My constituency has suffered quite considerably under the Conservative Government, especially from the attack on manufacturing industry. The Hoover plant at Cambuslang, where I worked, used to employ more than 5,000 people. It was a busy, successful factory that made goods for sale and export, but the Government's blitz on manufacturing industry between 1979 and 1981 did not help. It now has a work force of a little more than 1,000, and the current policy of high interest rates is hitting the sales of Hoover goods, thereby causing recession and difficulties for the company and its work force.

The Clydesbridge steelworks in my constituency employs about 150 workers, compared with 2,000 or 3,000 in its heyday. Nevertheless, it is an important, integral part of the Scottish steel industry. Its highly skilled work force produces high-class goods. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) will deal more than adequately with British Steel's announcement affecting Clydesdale tube works. The Scottish steel industry is of interest to us all, and the lack of Government support is disgraceful. They are condoning British Steel buying steel tubes from abroad, thereby worsening the balance of payments deficit. British workers will be paid off, with consequent rises in social security payments.

Unemployment in my constituency varies from 10 per cent. in the so-called good areas to 14 per cent. in the bad ones. In other words, while we hear about an economic miracle, there are no signs of it in my constituency.

I regret that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is not here—I accept that it is a long day for him—but I have no hesitation in saying in his absence that we have in his job a man who is dogmatically opposed to any involvement by his Department in key sectors of British industry. He is taking a hands-off approach. As has been said, he is standing on the sidelines watching the game. My hon. Friends and I fear that the right hon. Gentleman is in the job only so that he can be a yes man for the Prime Minister, helping to keep the wet and dry balance in the Cabinet, and to cast a vote for the Prime Minister when she is in any danger in that forum.

The CBI is establishing links with organisations throughout the British political spectrum, rather than just within the Conservative party, and that is as it should be. The CBI has expressed extreme unhappiness with current Government policy. At its recent conference in Glasgow, it made some devastating comments about that policy, which we in the Opposition cannot dismiss simply as party political attacks, bearing in mind the quarter from which they came.

That and other criticism must focus attention on the Department of Trade and Industry because while for many years, indeed since the last war, the DTI has been crucially involved with industry, we are now seeing that Department withdraw from the industrial scene. For example, the Department will spend £1·5 billion in the coming financial year. Since 1987, its expenditure has fallen by almost a third as the result of a reduction of nearly £700 million given in support to aerospace, shipbuilding, steel and vehicle manufacturing. Clearly, the DTI is narrowing its focus as it views its role in British industry. The economy needs a thrusting Department of Trade and Industry which, without dogma, gets itself involved with any aspect of industrial and manufacturing life that benefits the nation.

There can be no doubt that the United Kingdom economy faces a difficult year. The recession is here and the full inflationary pressures have yet to be felt. The task of striking a balance between those aspects will be more difficult, and I accept that life has been made more difficult for the Government by the rise in oil prices. I hope that that rise will not constantly be trotted out as the great excuse for the state of the economy.

All forms of transport should be linked and one should not be discriminated against. We are told that £4 billion will be spent to improve London's rail services. Bearing in mind the fact that each hon. Member must represent his or her own corner, I question why no money is available to upgrade the killer A1 and A77 roads in Scotland. I may be told that that is a matter for the Secretary of State for

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Scotland. I accept that some work has been done to upgrade the A74 to motorway status, but more must be done.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Hughes) said, we are told that no money is available to electrify the Edinburgh to Aberdeen rail line and that funds are not available now for the much-vaunted high-speed InterCity rail link between Scotland and London. The Government make great play of the money that they are spending and say that in relation to need, everything must be considered in balance. The Secretary of State for Transport should get together more closely with the Secretary of State for Scotland to ensure that any money put into transport is fairly spread throughout the United Kingdom with Scotland at the forefront.

1.5 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stockport (Mr. Favell) on going through the departure lounge as a Parliamentary Private Secretary with more publicity than I have as a PPS and a Minister combined. His expression of support for the Chancellor, even though he has stopped being his PPS, is a sign of solidarity within the Government that may or may not be copied by others.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas), talking on behalf of the Scottish National party about the steel industry, has shown how disgraceful it is for the Scottish nationalists to claim to be the Scottish National party, let alone a national party, when they are not present for a debate on industry, given the sad news about the steel industry in Scotland.

When I was working in the British Steel Corporation, there was a tension between Wales and Scotland over strip mills, which has been there ever since the decision was made to split the strip mills. It is peculiar that the nationalists can agree to have a Welshman speak for the Scots on a day like today.

I shall say very little about roads and transport, because I hope that next week I shall be called to speak early in the debate on road casualty reductions. I greatly welcome that debate.

I am pleased to speak towards the end of this debate, because it allows me to make suggestions that people in various Departments may come across as they scan *Hansard* to see if there is anything relevant to them.

It gives me an opportunity at the beginning of the parliamentary year to make some overall points. First, we must take the family perspective and life cycle into account in more of our policies. Family policy is not just about money or social security, although money is important for those in poverty. It is about trying to ensure that our education and health systems and our anti-crime proposals take account of generational changes and responsibilities of one towards another within families and within communities and between generations.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy rightly talked about rural districts. Rural action projects in Northern Ireland show how, in all the less favoured parts of the United Kingdom, we must be concerned not just about farmers' incomes, but about the well-being and the quality of life of people, especially women. Too often when developing policies, we consider how they affect men and their working lives, rather than those women who generally carry the burden of caring for dependants. By trying to raise family confidence and competence we can ensure that other caring services mesh in, with self-interest but without selfishness.

When I stopped being a Minister, I was greeted by descriptions in various newspapers of exactly what certain journalists thought about me. If trying to cut casualties on the roads and trying to overcome transport problems for people with handicaps exposes me to scorn, my shoulders are broad enough to carry it. I was surprised when one newspaper gave an extra half-page to one of its journalists who had hurt his back for a time for his description of how difficult it was to get around, when I had had remarkably little support from the same newspaper and others in trying to overcome the difficulties that many people have, sometimes for a lifetime or for decades.

It is important to take a robust attitude in Europe when the Community starts making proposals expected to be against the interests of people in this country, let alone other European countries. I make passing reference to the European Commission's proposal that the voluntary driving of minibuses should be banned. Its proposal was that everyone driving a minibus, especially a community minibus, should have a public service vehicle licence.

The reason that that proposal matters more in the United Kingdom is that people here could drive minibuses with an ordinary licence. We had 65,000 more minibuses than our European partners and for every minibus we had six to 10 volunteer drivers, which meant 10 million or more welfare journeys a year for the elderly, children, disabled people, students, affinity groups and people going to work together. Sadly, on that issue we received little help from people outside a small core group.

I pay tribute to the Department of Transport's disabled transport policy advisory unit and the small team within the Department who have helped to ensure that the United Kingdom leads the world in many ways.

I do not want people to think that it is only legislation that makes a difference. We need the commitment to try to fill the gaps in provision and so to improve people's standard of living. I am talking not just about material improvements but about improvements in people's quality of life.

It is good to see the low-cost accident remedial measures coming into force around the country. It is also good that we have been trying things out and extending their application if they work.

The same must apply to the idea of a common currency throughout Europe. I have been interested to note that, since my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) resigned as deputy Prime Minister, the Labour party has spoken with two voices —sometimes even on the same day. The shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer says that he is against movements towards a common currency, while the Leader of the Opposition says that he is in favour of it.

Our occasional debates about leadership in the Conservative party make me wonder how it is possible for Labour Members and their supporters to put up with their existing leader, when everyone knows that their deputy leader would be rather better at doing the job. That is one of the difficulties that Opposition Members must sort out for themselves, and it need not concern us in our debate on the Queen's Speech.

The two by-election results yesterday may have shown the Conservative party to be somewhat out of fashion, but I suspect that having reached the low-tide mark, as we rise up we shall witness the debates within the Labour party becoming rather more articulate and clear—which is more than can be said for the speech of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown). Despite having been given repeated opportunities to address them, he managed to duck the important European issues.

I want to deal with environmental protection. The Department of Transport deserves credit for having produced at least two editions of its booklet "Transport and the Environment".

Mr. Prescott: The hon. Gentleman produced them.

Mr. Bottomley: It was my hon. Friend the Member for Hampshire, North-West (Sir D. Mitchell) who originally had the idea.

We must persuade people to consider the consequences of having better railways to give them the choice of leaving their cars or of having better roads to keep traffic out of residential areas. We must seek to reconcile some of the important arguments in the debate and then examine the results. If we do that, we shall be able to have a better informed debate. Okehampton was a good example. We had decades of delay and then, when the decision was eventually made, all the commentating media stopped taking an interest because it was obvious that the right decision had been made. The arguments had all been the wrong way, but no one would admit it.

The way in which it was possible to fit in a road between Maiden Castle and Dorchester provides another good example of how environmental interests have been taken into account.

The environmental impact matters to a road scheme in my constituency—the approach road to the east London river crossing.

While on that subject, I must say that the Labour party has not changed its spots. It is curious that, when local councillors in Greenwich wanted to reappoint a barrister to the inquiry on the bridge—which I understand is greatly welcomed by Labour authorities to the north of the Thames although it is objected to by Greenwich council and of no help to my constituents—the announcement was made by two prospective Labour candidates. Of all the councillors who could have been chosen, the two prospective Labour candidates were picked. It looks as though we are talking about £67,000 in their favour.

Similarly, when Greenwich last had the chance of appointing members to the health authority, it did not just appoint those same two prospective Labour candidates; it also appointed Nick Raynsford, Labour's prospective candidate for the Greenwich constituency. That is the kind of political bias that one may expect from the next Labour Government.

I remind the House that I was elected a year after the last Labour Government came to office. People discovered then that we were not having milk and honey all round.

Mr. John P. Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bottomley: I had better not, because others wish to speak.

Mr. Smith: It is a valid point.

Mr. Bottomley: That may be so. The hon. Gentleman should intervene on his hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) if he wishes to make his point.

We may have a robust debate on these matters, and that is to be welcomed. The Queen's Speech refers to some of the international problems. It is absolutely clear that we should extend our brand of flexible politics, in which we can have ups and downs in the polls and in votes as well as having a flexible economic process, so that we do not find the shelves bare. We shall find that there are fewer wars within countries and fewer battles between them. It is a long time since democratic countries last fought each other. It is a long time since countries that allowed more than one political party resorted to civil war because of the result of an election.

Twelve years ago, I was taken to El Salvador to try to help delay the assassination of an archbishop and to try to reduce the risk of assassination of the Jesuits who run the central American university. Sadly, there was not a great deal of success, but at least it showed that Britain took an interest in human rights and in undemocratic regimes. We sometimes underestimate the influence of the United Kingdom, this Parliament and individual Members travelling overseas to show that it is not just the BBC that matters but the political process and some of the economic freedoms that we have managed to enshrine in our system.

One of the messages that will go out from the Queen's Speech debate—beyond Iraq and Kuwait, terrible as those events are—is that, by spreading the idea of democracy, open society and robust debate and disagreement, we shall do a great deal more for future generations around the world than if we confine ourselves solely to the material standard of living in Britain. I look forward to speaking in further debates during the year on items in the Queen's Speech.

I hope that together we shall find ways of reducing avoidable distress, handicap and disadvantage, and that the Labour party will join in with support for more Tory policies as we move towards the next election.

1.15 pm

Dr. John Reid (Motherwell, North): As the House will expect in view of yesterday's announcement, most of my speech will deal with the steel industry. However, I shall make a few observations on other matters. Today's debate has ranged wide—from the evils of the Commission in Brussels to the undoubted virtue of the cracks in Streatham high street.

Perhaps I should begin by referring to the missing fighters for the Scottish steel industry. I am much too polite and it is not my style to mention that some Scottish National party Members are missing. I realise that we are all busy people. But as the matter was raised by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Dr. Thomas) I feel entitled to make some comments. In the last few years I have been told by the Scottish nationalists that the Labour party cannot possibly throw all its weight behind the Scottish steel industry because we are led by a Welshman. So to learn today that because of reciprocal arrangements the official SNP spokesman on the Scottish steel industry is a Welsh nationalist came as a shock. The two parties intend to fight to the death for the Scottish steel industry. I promise the House that I shall do my

[Dr. John Reid]

homework and immediately read all the documents on the Scottish steel industry issued by the Welsh Nationalist Party. It should make interesting reading.

The hon. Members for Crawley (Mr. Soames) and for Stockport (Mr. Favell) raised the national question of the development of the market and so on. I shall make only one observation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) said, nation states came about by a collection of principalities, cities or, as in the case of the United Kingdom, nations coming together. The dynamo that drove the emergence of nation states during their great period of development and the cement that held them together even when the nation state included different countries was the market. In Europe now we are seeing precisely the same emergence of political structures, some more embryonic than others, as a result of the development of the market. Commitment to the market in Europe and the need for superstructural political response to intervene on occasions at that level in the market are called into question. The emergence of that crucial element of the political dimension of Europe is swimming with the tide of history and ultimately the Prime Minister's views on the social charter and on Europe will be washed up on the shores of history like the anachronism that they are.

The hon. Members for Crawley and for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) tended to implicate the Labour party in some of the unfortunate events of the past fortnight in Europe. On one occasion we were accused by the hon. Member for Crawley of dividing the unity of the House behind the Prime Minister in her negotiations in Europe. But the lack of unity in the Government undermined her. The Prime Minister does not believe that. Every time I ask her why someone resigned she tells me that it is because they agreed on everything and there was agreement on policy.

It should be noted as a historical fact that it has become a peculiar characteristic of the modern Conservative party that, whenever a spirit of universal agreement breaks out, it manifests itself in mass resignations. Next week, we should watch the space that has been left by the deputy Prime Minister because it will be interesting to see who fills it.

The hon. Member for Stockport ditched Adam Smith as his ideological buttress, presumably because he is a whingeing Scotsman, and called to the aid of the party Richard Cobden. Cobden may have been right in 1845, but that does not make him right in 1990. Those who are locked into the free trade movement of the 19th century, and neolithic Marxists who think that the solutions of 1848 must be correct in 1990, are both wide of the mark and devoid of any realistic or relevant analysis of the modern condition.

Yesterday's decision to lay off 1,200 workers and close the Clydesdale tube works is a devastating blow to my area. However, it did not come as a bolt from the blue. In my maiden speech, I warned about the dangers of privatisation and the consequences for Clydesdale tube works as well as for Ravenscraig and Dalzell. After the so-called guarantees of 3 December 1987 from the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, I warned that not only had there been no mention of Clydesdale, but that we had had not guarantees for a few years but a timetable for the execution of the steel industry in Scotland. When the Act privatising the steel industry was passing through the House, I, my hon. Friends the Members for Motherwell, South (Dr. Bray) and for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) and others warned of what would happen if the steel industry were privatised. Motherwell district council commissioned a report, the Arthur Young report, which I commend to any hon. Member interested in the steel industry in Scotland, which predicted almost to the month what would happen.

Ministers cannot say that they did not know—they did not want to know. They were driven on by ideology in hot pursuit of the aim, come hell or high water, of privatising the steel industry. The tragedy is that the hell will be not for the Minister but for the people around Motherwell and in Lanarkshire. It was not just ideology either. The suspicion lingers that the Government wanted to rid themselves of those turbulent priests, the defenders of the Scottish steel industry, who had defied the Prime Minister and Sir Robert Scholey for almost a decade, and kept Ravenscraig open. Privatisation was the vehicle that allowed the Government to achieve, after 10 years, a relaxation of pressure from the political defence of the steel industry in Scotland. This great tragedy was predictable but not inevitable. If the Government had been interested, had listened or had acted, the closure could have been avoided.

That hammer blow to the steel industry yesterday means 1,200 jobs lost. It means 1,200 families in Lanarkshire who will have enforced idleness as a Christmas present, courtesy of Sir Robert Scholey. Instead of white Christmases, they will have black Christmases, courtesy of Black Bob. When Conservative Members talk about whingeing and moaning Scots and the *Evening Standard* talks about subsidy junkies, we have to ask ourselves what kind of people they are talking about. These are hard-headed, hard-working, realistic people.

Representatives of the work force met the Secretary of State on Monday. Instead of the £100 million of investment that is needed, they asked for only £10 million to £12 million, a drop in the ocean for British Steel but enough to have retained the competitive edge of the tube division of British Steel. It is a work force which has increased quality, productivity and delivery times over the past three years. By its own efforts, it has increased the yield of clapped-out mills from 72 per cent. to 82 per cent. If there had been an investment of £10 million, the figure would have been 90 per cent. Anyone who knows anything about the steel industry will realise that that is a fantastic figure, even with modern equipment. Despite four years of effort, market share declined. Why was that? The answer can be given in two words—investment starvation. The commitment and effort of the work force was not matched and reflected by British Steel's top management. That is why there is a feeling of betrayal.

British Steel added insult to injury yesterday when it gave as an excuse for the closure of the tube mills that it was cheaper to buy pipes from abroad. Why, I ask the Government, is it cheaper to buy them from Manussman in Germany, Dolmini in Italy or Valourec in France? It is cheaper because the efforts of the work forces in those plants have been matched by the investment of their companies and the research and development of their Governments. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline, East referred to investment and research and development earlier in the debate.

The original crime of British Steel of neglect and lack of investment becomes the very excuse for the crime of closure of the Clydesdale plant which was announced yesterday. There will be 1,200 families involved initially, but the scale of devastation will be much worse than that. More than 700 more will be affected in April at the Ravenscraig strip works. That is a work force with a productivity claim of 2·33 man hours per tonne. It is not just the best in Scotland or in Britain, but the best productivity figure by that standard in Europe.

All the members of that work force are being ditched and the Secretary of State for Scotland is doing nothing. The right hon. and learned Gentleman should be ascertaining the identity of the prospective purchasers to whom British Steel was talking. Secondly, he should be demanding information from British Steel to enable him, the Scottish Office and Locate in Scotland to contact them. Thirdly, he should be facilitating an exchange of views on potential purchase. Fourthly, he should be making it plain to British Steel that if that results in a potential purchase of the Clydesdale tube works, it will be forced to sell that as a going concern. If not, the monopoly position of British Steel will allow it to abuse the market and to close a works which could be profitable and which could be purchased. If the Secretaries of State for Scotland and for Trade and Industry do not do that, they will be colluding with British Steel in closing a potential producer for the North sea market and throwing hundreds or thousands of people on to the dole queue, and many into misery.

Once again, as they have done for 10 years, the Government are crippling the balance of trade by ensuring that the extension of works in the North sea will take place not with the products of British steel plants but with those of our major industrial competitors.

1.27 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West): My hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell, North (Dr. Reid) need not have apologised to me for taking a little more time than he said he would need. The problems which he outlined are great ones for his constituents and for the works at Clydesdale, and he presented us with a graphic picture. It is clear that, in recent years, workers, no matter how much effort they have expended, have been betrayed by the Government. So much for the problems of success that economic Ministers are always telling us we have to deal with nowadays.

I must apologise to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for missing his opening speech. I had problems with London Transport. I am not making it up as I go along. Unlike the hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames), I was not wandering up and down a District line underground train looking for the restaurant coach. I was experiencing the usual signalling delays in the Whitechapel area, which everyone who uses the District line experiences.

I waited three quarters of an hour on Forest Gate station for the Network SouthEast service from Gidea park to come through. No announcement was made. Nothing was said until it was obvious that the train was going to be half an hour late. We waited 27 minutes before we were told that there would be a delay. When I spoke to the staff, they said, "We are sorry, but no one told us. There is a VDU at Forest Gate station, but it is not in use because there are no qualified staff."

The Minister is coming to Stratford station on 23 November—which I welcome—and I intend to ask him many questions about the service from Southend and Gidea Park to Liverpool Street station. It needs many dramatic improvements. It is nonsense that, while people are waiting at Forest Gate station whose trains have been cancelled, other trains whisk through on their way to Liverpool Street. There is no flexibility in the system for those trains to stop and pick up those people and take them to Stratford or Liverpool Street. Whether it is incompetence, inefficiency, poor resources or bad management, I do not know, but I gave the waiting passengers at Forest Gate station the benefit of a much longer speech even than I would make now if I had the time to do so. They asked me to pass on to the Secretary of State for Transport their extreme anger about what happened this morning and to point out that it happens regularly to passengers who have to travel to central London.

Transport efficiency assists industrial efficiency, so it is right that the two subjects should have been linked today. The CBI has pointed out that congestion costs industry and commerce in London about £7·5 billion a year. It is an enormous waste of resources within our capital city. It is not surprising that London's transport system is in near to chaos. It is overpriced, overcrowded, under-resourced and under pressure.

London has the highest fares in Europe, which lead people who have access to private vehicles to bring them on to the roads. It also leads to an upsurge in commuter coaches, which contribute to the problems in central London. Privatised bus routes are dipping around side roads—rat-running and bringing even more problems. There is insufficient road maintenance and unco-ordinated road works. All those factors reduce London traffic to moving more slowly than it did at the turn of the century.

I welcome the Bill announced in the Gracious Speech that will implement the Horne report. It is much overdue. Horne reported in 1986 and made 73 recommendations, so it is about time they were implemented. Of course, we will have to read the small print, but I am sure that the Government can expect a great deal of support for that measure.

I recently read that 600,000 holes are dug in London each year, but I do not know who went around counting them. It reminds me of the old Beatles song about how many holes it took to fill the Albert hall. If someone could go around counting all those holes, surely it is possible for someone to co-ordinate all the work that leads to 600,000 holes being dug in London each year. I welcome improvements in London's infrastructure, but not in the unco-ordinated way in which it is undertaken.

London presents a dismal picture—it is unplanned, unco-ordinated and unpleasant. The quality of London life has deteriorated dramatically during the past decade. The Association of London Authorities recently commissioned the Henley centre for forecasting to study the problems of London, especially in the light of 1992 and the opportunities and problems that the Single European Act will present for the capital city. The centre highlighted London's poor transport infrastructure as a major constraint on the capital's economic growth and cultural attractiveness. It stressed the unco-ordinated framework of transport in London.

We keep returning to the co-ordination of transport. The Henley centre asked Mass Observation to conduct a

[Mr. Tony Banks]

poll of Londoners, and it was not surprised to discover that 93 per cent. of London's citizens felt that traffic congestion had worsened during the past 10 years. More ominously, 77 per cent. believed that it would get worse in the 1990s. Some 67 per cent. wanted more restrictions on the use of private cars in London and, I am glad to report 64 per cent. believed that there should be a strategic planning body for the whole of London, along the lines of the old London county council or the Greater London council. It is a great pleasure to say that the Labour party is officially committed to the creating of a new Londonwide strategic local authority for the capital city.

Nowhere is there a more vital and obvious need for co-ordination and planning than in transport, but the Government despise planning and strategic thinking. Why is London's transport in such an appalling state? I believe that it is because the Government take no overview of it. If one wants to examine models of London's transport structures, one must go to Olympia and York, because they have in effect taken over as the capital's planning authority, which is disgraceful.

For the people of London, who are so hard-pressed as a consequence of the Government's unco-ordinated transport policies, relief will come only with the election of a Labour Government. One is delighted that that day has been hastened by the by-election results last night in Bradford, North and Bootle. The skids are under the Government, and Londoners will rejoice when they are thrown into the dustbin of history.

1.35 pm

Mr. John Prescott (Kingston upon Hull, East): I am most grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks), who took less time than I expected, but who I am sure had much more to tell the House about the real problems of London's transport.

Although today's debate is concerned with both industry and transport, I shall concentrate on the latter. I am sure that, like myself, the Secretary of State has much to say on a whole range of issues, but there is not sufficient time to debate them all today, even with my hon. Friend's generosity in resuming his place so quickly.

In examining the transport crisis, I want to look for areas of agreement rather than disagreement, and thus further confound the Secretary of State, who discovered, when we appeared together on a television programme recently, that there was some agreement between us in respect of safety, but who predicted that it would not last more than 12 hours. I assure him that it will.

Clearly there is a crisis facing our transport system, however it is measured, and most of the bodies that have reported on it—the Church, the Trades Union Congress, the Confederation of British Industry, consumer groups, local authorities, the Select Committee, and the media—conclude that the system is inadequate, for whatever reason. That is a matter of general agreement.

There is general agreement also that it is the most congested transport system of any developed nation in Europe, as well as being the most expensive and environmentally damaging. There is concern about the quality of service and the safety that it provides. It is underfunded, underinvested and underperforming. I have sought to justify those claims in previous debates, and I shall not reiterate those arguments now.

Transport has become a major political issue, not because of what politicians are telling the public, but, despite their reassurances, because of the public's daily experiences on the Underground, at airports, on trains or buses, or even travelling in their own cars. The public just believe that Britain's transport system could be better than it is.

The Secretary of State rightly claims record levels of investment, and it is true that, in both absolute and real terms, there has been a tremendous increase. But that comes after 10 years of underinvestment, and the country's transport stock has grown a great deal older. Most of the stock on Network SouthEast is 19 years old.

One problem is that the Treasury has been running our transport system for too long—under both Labour and Conservative Administrations. It is time for a change of thinking. Long-term transport investment cannot be fitted into the two-year span required by the Treasury, regardless of whether the Treasury, under any Government, can get its projections right—and that has been a matter of contention in our other recent debates.

The public's daily experience has relevance not only to this debate but to yesterday's by-election results. When I visited Bradford, I found that the people there are concerned that their city is not served by an electrified route. Instead, the line is electrified as far as Leeds, but there trains must have a diesel locomotive shunted on to them to take them to Bradford. The people there are quite right to think that electrification should be extended. The people of Bootle are equally concerned about the decline of the shipping and port industries, and are worried about connecting freight routes to the Channel tunnel. The great uncertainty about transport issues was reflected in the by-elections. I am delighted with the results and I hope that transport had a part to play in them. Clearly those issues keep transport to the fore.

Everyone's experience of the public transport system makes it a major political issue. A lot of the problems are due to the policies that the Government have pursued: deregulation, competition, privatisation, cuts in public financial support and the encouragement of private transport have undermined the public transportation system.

The hon. Member for Crawley (Mr. Soames) said it is good to go on the best of British Rail, but my experience is not as good as his. I use British Rail often. I identify the best of British Rail as its new electric traction. I shall not reiterate the story, which was given ample coverage in the press, about the toilet system and whether it can flush up instead of down. I was surprised that a new train for the 20th century should have such problems. When I went to Bradford yesterday and waited for the same train, it left the station 15 minutes late. It is a brand new train. It is new stock, which goes at 140 mph. It is one of the 21st century trains that we have been talking about and is supposed to be comparable with the TGV. It was late because the doors could not be made to shut or open properly.

When I joined the train at Leeds at 6 o'clock this morning it was 25 minutes late on the section between Leeds and Doncaster because the brakes kept sticking. Those are new trains, which incorporate new engineering and new concepts. They do not have such problems on the

continent and they did not have them with the TGV. The daily experience on the railways for an awful lot of people is not good and not adequate.

Mr. Soames: Nevertheless, does the hon. Gentleman accept that one of the outstanding improvements in British Rail is in the attitude of service to the general public? Previously a frightful, unkempt fellow without a tie, with no hat and his false teeth hanging out, was reluctant to tell one to which platform to go, to catch a train. At least they make a major effort now. It is wrong to say that there has not been a dramatic improvement on InterCity routes.

Mr. Prescott: Of course, there will always be different experiences due to personalities. We want to encourage the best. What is unfortunate about the British Rail system is that the staff have suffered cuts and reorganisations, and are losing confidence in the railway system. That is their worry. When I ask why a train has broken down, they are ashamed that even the new stock is not performing well. It undermines their confidence, which is reflected in their relationships with customers. There is a long way to go, but we all welcome the new stock and the improvements.

I welcome every penny that the Secretary of State is able to get from the Treasury to improve the system, which is old and dilapidated. Some of it is in a dangerous state and needs to be replaced as soon as possible.

I congratulate the Secretary of State and the Government on making the right decision about the two underground lines. I refer to the King's Cross London link, and I hope that the Hackney to Chelsea line will also be built. I disagreed with the Government about the Jubilee line as I do not think that it was the highest priority. We can have an argument about that. I think that the central rail study review upholds my view.

Now we are making decisions about major investments —in the region of £1 billion for each project. Those are the sort of choices we have. A lot of money will have to be found for the Channel tunnel. Whoever has the job of Secretary of State, and I hope that I shall have that opportunity shortly, needs to decide priorities.

How does one manage congestion and deal with the problems and the priorities? Does the Queen's Speech address those problems? The debate has reflected many of the concerns. I shall wait to see the total amount of public expenditure that the Secretary of State has managed to get. All too often targets have been given and amounts stated, but when one takes inflation into account, and one finds that that is twice or 50 per cent. greater than expected, the improvement in real terms turns out to be nothing. There has been a history of that in the past two years and I shall not dwell on it. We shall have to wait and see.

We must wait and see what British Rail has to say in its corporate plan, which is getting to be like its trains—later and later. At least one used to be able to rely on getting an autumn statement from British Rail to find out its priorities. The importance of that is that ever since the Secretary of State's announcement about the amount of money available, I thought that we were being given an assurance that new types of investment, such as that in Network SouthEast, were not to be delayed. The west coast line, which was announced and then delayed, would be relieved by new sources of funds. Apparently British Rail is now saying that the delay will continue. We must wait to see what the new chairman says in the spring, and what the Department of Transport says in later statements.

The money made available to British Rail should be used for the improvement of the safety of the system. The amounts now being returned to British Rail and the underground system are about the same as the amounts that the Government have taken away in reducing the public service obligation levels. The Government are trying to cut corners on safety. Inquiry reports have referred to that. I hope that the money that is needed for safety measures will be provided; we recognise that that is essential.

A report says that, even given the money available, the Government still intend to reduce the PSO level—for instance, on Network SouthEast. That can only mean ever-increasing fares on what must be the most expensive railway system in Europe, although it offers the poorest quality. It offers no hope for the people of the south-east. They are uncertain about the Channel tunnel connections and about the modern stock. The only certainty is a higher price for what service they do receive. That will be unacceptable—a mere breadbasket of support for the south-east.

My major criticism of the Queen's Speech does not relate to resources—although we must wait for the proof of the pudding. I welcome the direction, but I am concerned about the approach. As I say at most of my transport meetings, I am genuinely sorry that in Britain an ideological difference still exists in regard to transport policy. Only in Britain is there such a difference—about whether Government should have a role in planning, intervention and the use of public money.

Governments of both left and right in Europe are quite prepared to use such mechanisms to provide an integrated transport system that not only provides the best and most efficient service for people and for the movement of goods, but begins to address itself to the two fundamental questions: what can transport do to reduce the massive congestion cost, and how can it stop the environmental damage that is threatened? That is the challenge for the transport system. It is uniquely placed to make a special contribution.

Market systems cannot provide the best solution; by the very nature of the philosophy of competition between the modes of transport, we cannot get the best from their integration. Europe has recognised—and it is tragic that we do not recognise it in Britain—that there is a role for Government planning and intervention, and a role for public money.

I was saddened to read a speech made by the Secretary of State for Transport and reported in *The Times*—I am sorry that my photocopied page does not give the date. The article is headed

"Parkinson blames 'myopic' planners for traffic chaos",

and continues:

"The post-war new town planners had failed to predict correctly the demand for transport, which is largely responsible for the transport difficulties confronting London and the south-east, Mr. Parkinson said."

Mr. Soames: Quite right.

Mr. Prescott: It may be quite right that the Secretary of State said it—indeed, that is not in doubt—but is it true? When I read that, it reminded me of the Buchanan report of 1963. Then, the planners looked at the predictions for

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transport—I do not think that they involved anyone in the right hon. Gentleman's office—and the increased use of the motor vehicle. They concluded that if we did nothing about the growth of the motor vehicle, the result in the 19809s would be the problems that we are witnessing now.

I asked the Library to look up the figures for light goods vehicles and motor cars in 1962. There were then 6·6 million such vehicles, with a projected growth by 1989 to 19·6 million. It was predicted that by 2010 the figure would be 26·4 million. I asked the Library to take account of the Department of Transport's predictions, and it came up with a high prediction of 31·4 million, or 27·8 million. That is smack in the middle. Such accuracy has been unerring for 40 years. A person in the Treasury would have a tremendous job to achieve such accurate figures.

That annual compounded rate in the growth of vehicles was predicted. However, the trouble is that the politicians ignored that advice. We cannot blame the officials. We were not prepared to take into account how those difficulties could be avoided.

What are we doing about it, since we know that that is patently and damagingly true? The Queen's Speech has to be judged by that question. The Secretary of State says that he intends to increase the public service obligation levels, the external financing limits and the transport tax. Transport tax resources have more than doubled—from £7 billion to £15 billion, but we spend only 25 per cent. of that amount on our transport system. Under the previous Labour Government, 35 per cent. was spent on it. In Europe the average amount is 50 per cent. The m oney that goes to the Treasury is not used fully to improve transport. More money ought to be made available to it.

The Secretary of State referred to providing more resources for British Rail. However, the Government reduced British Rail's external financing limits. They also reduced British Rail's subsidy. About £953 million was provided in 1983. The Government claim that by reducing that figure to £488 million they have scored a success. Figures provided for me by the Library suggest that, at 1983 prices, over £2 billion has been withdrawn from British Rail. At today's prices, that is over £3 billion. British Rail's borrowing level has also been reduced by £2 billion.

Many demands have been made in our debates for investment in British Rail. Money could have been invested in it, but the Treasury reduced British Rail's external financing limits and its expenditure. No other railway system in Europe has been denied such huge financial resources. The quality of our system has been considerably affected; that has not happened anywhere else in Europe. No country can run a railway system by means only of fares. Public money must be invested in it. A balance has to be struck between the two. The Secretary of State often refers to that balance. At present, the balance between the two is wrong. British Rail has to work within an impossible financial framework.

The Government now intend to provide more money for public transport. They realise that they have made a mistake. However, they are 10 years too late. There have been 10 years of misery. Our transport system has been undermined. I am grateful, nevertheless, that the Secretary of State appears to have satisfied the Treasury that more money is needed. The Treasury may have been influenced by what people say about public transport and by the fact that the poor old Secretary of State was the only person who did not receive a standing ovation at the Tory party conference.

Whatever the reason may be, today the Secretary of State can claim that his Department is to get more money. The Opposition have claimed for many years that more public money is needed for transport. For the Government to say that more public money should be used for transport represents an advance. The PSO levels and capital grants will have to be increased. We await the final details, but at last we are starting on the right road. The problem is that we embarked on the wrong road and the wrong policies. Passengers have had to shoulder most of the burden. They suffer from lower quality and higher fares.

The Government intend to introduce the same policies for the roads. They are to introduce toll roads. Sufficient money is already being raised from road users. However, the Government intend to place another burden on them. Only £1 out of every £4 raised in taxes is used for transport purposes. Toll roads will lead to even greater expense for the road user. They will cost more to build and there will be even greater delays, as happened with the Birmingham north relief road. That could have been started 12 months ago. Congestion will increase, as we have seen with the Dartford tunnel. Toll roads have their price. Moreover, they will lead to the development of first and second-class road systems. To me that is anathema. Companies will pay for passes and Members of Parliament will be given free passes when they are on the business of the House. Such considerations will no doubt apply. However, most nauseating is that as it takes 20 or 30 years to pay for a toll road, the road that it is relieving will have to be kept congested to encourage people to take the fast route on the toll road. The public road system cannot be run like that.

Even if the Government decide not to proceed in that way, they may decide to route roads through the best green belt land and into attactive areas. The old arguments about the M25 apply to that. The development of land determines the route, not the transport requirements and the infrastructure. It is motivated and led by land values. I should have thought that we had learnt enough from the London docks about what happens when a route is determined by land prices.

The only reason for the privatisation of the trust ports is to allow the Government and the Treasury to gain access to the land around our 110 trust ports. What if some of them do not want their trust status to be removed? Will the Government force them into a privatised state? It is all about taking money from selling off more land. The Chancellor said yesterday that he estimates to receive more than £5 billion a year from privatisation, so he must get more assets to sell off.

We heard from hon. Members about the red routes. In principle, traffic management is an important point, which I fully support. However, the problem with red routes is that getting vehicles faster into the centre leads to more congestion in the centre. Stopping parking in one street moves the problem to another area, where most of the buses are operating. Therefore, public transport is delayed, but people are saying, "Improve public transport," so that they have a genuine choice when travelling.

I very much welcome the Horne report. It says that 3 million holes are dug a year, and 1,000 deaths are associated with that. I congratulate the Government on

implementing the Horne report, which was concerned about confusion between different Departments. It must have been staggering, but almost fitting, to find the Department of Transport totally confused. On 7 January it announced the start of the red routes, but three weeks later it said that it was tearing up the road for road works. Does that mean that the scheme will be delayed, or did one part of the Department not know what the other part was doing? Confusion apparently exists even in the Department itself. Perhaps the Secretary of State will say whether it is intended to proceed with the scheme.

The red routes are about traffic management. It is important to give buses priority and more space on the roads. The car may be hindered more, but we should provide a fast and frequent bus service on which people can rely. A bus has much to offer and we can use it effectively. It can be set free only if we regulate it and give it priority over the car. Let people decide whether to use the bus rather than the car, but that is not an ideological problem. That is what must be done, not only to give people better choice but because it is the best solution for relieving congestion and dealing with the environmental targets that we have accepted internationally. If that is not done, it will not be possible to achieve those targets. This is a move forward, but it is not enough because it is not a comprehensive concept for transport.

We are not anti-car, but many people want to transfer to public transport, and cheap fares offer them the chance to do that. It might not be necessary to pursue cheap fare alternatives. If we provide a regular, frequent service that can be relied on, people will automatically choose to transfer and we must intervene to achieve that.

The most pleasing aspects of the Queen's Speech are the commitment and endorsement of the Secretary of State's desire, of which he has spoken several times, to reduce the number of accidents and deaths on the roads. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), who as a Minister at the Department of Transport spent much time trying to reduce the number of deaths and accidents. The Department is right. We have a better record than other countries, but far more people are killed on our roads than in many of the tragedies that have occurred recently. I am delighted that we are giving greater attention to those issues.

I am also delighted that we are considering the proposals of Dr. North. They will undoubtedly help to reduce the numbers killed and injured on the roads. Let us not forget that the majority of those accidents occur in urban areas and affect primarily youngsters and old people. That shows that we must do something about traffic control as well as speeding traffic through the cities. In other words, we must achieve a proper balance.

As I do not doubt that the Secretary of State wishes to reduce the number of deaths and accidents on our roads, I fail to understand why he does not take certain steps now, for example on random breath testing and rear seat belts. In recent weeks I have been examining the arguments and statistics on those issues.

It is argued that only 6 per cent. of people are using rear seat belts and that in every 25,000 accidents, four people are killed. It is estimated that if rear seat belt wearing were made compulsory, the number of deaths could be reduced by 70 per cent. That would represent a great saving of life, of over half the total number killed, perhaps 2,000 people.

Hon. Members generally support the idea of random breath testing. The case for it is overwhelming. The evidence in other countries that have random testing shows that to be so. I am sure that the same will apply in areas of Britain that undertake random testing, even though there is no law to support such tests. Parliament has not laid down conditions in that respect, so random testing is now done at the discretion of individual chief constables. In other words, one might be stopped for a windscreen wiper offence and find, the policeman having smelled one's breath, that one is breathalysed.

Parliament should not have shied away from that problem, leaving it to chief constables, who know that they can save lives by increasing the deterrents. Apart from increased penalties, the greatest deterrent is the possibility of being caught. After all, one is more likely to get away with it if one happens to be in an area where the chief constable does not believe in random breath testing.

The evidence in, for example, New South Wales, shows that when random breath testing is introduced, the public are overwhelmingly in favour of it. The same sentiment has been expressed in polls in this country. The evidence shows that random testing results in the number of deaths being reduced by a third. So if we add one third of the 1,000 people killed as a result of drink driving to the other avoidable deaths of which we have been speaking, we see that about 50 per cent. of deaths could be avoided, if there were fewer accidents.

I intend to give the House a chance to vote on the random testing issue. Although that will occur in a non-partisan way, I am pleased that my party has supported it, and it appears in our policy document. Allowing for all the civil liberties arguments that arise, we must now take the random testing argument further, as we did with compulsory seat belt wearing. That means Parliament laying down the conditions applying to random testing, with all the protections that may be necessary. We must lay down the how, why and wherefore of it all and thereby take a major step towards improving safety on the roads.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: It is worth noting that the proportion of dead drivers above the legal limit has dropped faster in this country than in New South Wales. Nobody discussing the issue next week should necessarily assume that the hon. Gentleman's proposal is the best.

Mr. Prescott: What the hon. Gentleman says is true and we welcome the figures, but much depends on the way in which the testing is implemented. As it is not a legal requirement on the police, we cannot say that it applies throughout the country. That is why I am anxious for us to lay down a standard and the necessary protections and to recognise that we can do something to reduce the number of deaths and accidents on our roads. That being so, Parliament should have the opportunity to act. We shall give the House that opportunity. Members in all parts of the House are united in wishing to reduce the accident rate. By implementing the simple measures to which I referred, we can make that reduction.

I have explained how we could take steps to improve the legislation that the Government propose. We want to see more resources made available to the transport system generally—for rail, buses and for safety—and we are glad that the Government are committed to finding extra resources.

[Mr. Prescott]

In conclusion, I shall ask the Secretary of State a question that I have asked him before and on which I have chased him with correspondence. To be fair, I wish to place the question publicly.

Points have been made in the debate about Kuwait and the hostages. The House will recall that a British Airways plane landed in Kuwait on 2 August with 367 passengers on board. I have always wondered whether that plane could have been stopped and the hostages prevented from being delivered up. Relatives and crew members have told me that they are extremely concerned that the incident could have been prevented. There are rumours about whether Special Air Services staff from our own embassy were on the plane. All those rumours make the difficulties more contentious.

There has been correspondence between the Prime Minister and me on this matter, which is not open to argument. The plane landed at about 4 o'clock local time. We know that the takeover of the airport, the aeroplane and the crews occurred at about 4 o'clock. We know from other sources, particularly in America, that the invasion took place at 2 o'clock. As the Secretary of State in his letter, the Prime Minister and no one else will answer the question, will the Secretary of State now say when Britain first realised that troops had crossed the border? If that occurred at 2 o'clock, why did not we take essential action to prevent that plane landing and those people being delivered up as hostages? As my correspondence has failed to gain an answer, I ask the Secretary of State to answer the question in the public forum. Does he know when the invasion took place and was there a period in which the plane could have been prevented from landing?

2.7 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Cecil Parkinson): Unlike anyone else in the world as far as I am aware, the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) persists in ignoring the fact that Saddam Hussein made an unprovoked and unexpected attack on a helpless country. At that time, a British Airways plane was on its way to Kuwait. As has been explained to the hon. Gentleman, before the plane left London, the pilot checked with Kuwait airport, which checked with the ambassador, who said it was perfectly proper and sensible for the plane to leave.

When the pilot was flying over Egypt, he passed another British Airways plane coming from Kuwait. He checked with its captain whether there were any difficulties in Kuwait and that captain said no. When the pilot reached Kuwait he radioed to the ground crew, who said that it was perfectly safe to land. He then circled the airport to check for himself whether the ground crew might be in some way constrained in giving him the right answer, but he saw that it was safe to land and did so. He handed over the plane to the outgoing pilot, who set about checking it. Unhindered, the incoming pilot caught a taxi into Kuwait City, went to bed and was woken up a couple of hours later by a telephone call from London saying that there had been an invasion.

Every conceivable precaution had been taken and, having taken precautions, the captain landed the plane, satisfied that he was doing the right thing, which he was. There was no hindrance to him; he was able to take a taxi with the rest of his crew and travel to Kuwait city.

I hope that the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, who clearly has a deep but rather strange interest in the subject, will drop it. It is clear that British Airways took what precautions it could, the ambassador gave his advice in the best possible faith, and the captain took extra precautions and was able to land the plane safely. The plane almost left, but was delayed by a few minutes and while it was being finally checked, the crew were told that the airport was closed. I regard the hon. Gentleman's action as a cheap stunt and I hope the House feels that I have now given him the facts, which I previously gave him in letters.

Mr. Tony Banks: I do not want too much time in every debate here to be spent on Saddam Hussein. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East asked the Secretary of State whether, when the plane landed, Iraqi troops had crossed the border into Kuwait. That is the important point. Had they already crossed into Kuwait when the plane landed? It is a simple question.

Mr. Parkinson: That point is not clear. What is clear is that the airport was open. The captain had taken every precaution and our embassy had given him the best advice that was available to it.

Several hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East complained bitterly about our transport problems. The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) asked whether Britain had had a decade of sustained growth and improved performance. But most of our traffic problems stem from precisely that fact. There are nearly 7 million more cars on the roads than there were when the Government came to power. Some 32 million more people are using our airports and going abroad from them. We have 80 million tonnes more freight going through our ports. All those facts are evidence of the increased prosperity and economic growth whose existence the hon. Member for Dumfermline, East questioned.

We enjoyed almost a decade of growth, improved productivity, increased production and exports and hugely increased investment. What brought that period to an end was the decision, made after the stock exchange crash in 1987 and referred to by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, to accept that, as the then Chancellor said, the prospect of depression and slump was less acceptable than the risk of increased inflation. The Government made the decision to give the economy a boost, which led to overheating and gave rise to our current inflation. It was a mistake and we are paying for it, but we will put matters right only by pursuing our present policies. I noted that when the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East was asked whether he knew of a way of reducing inflation that would not involve a slowdown in the economy, he studiously avoided answering the question, just as he avoided most of the major questions that my right hon. Friend put to him.

The reduction and control of inflation will lead to the renewal of growth, the controlled expansion of the economy and an increase in manufacturing and investment, all of which the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East says he wants. All that the hon. Gentleman proposed was a series of placebos, whereas we

propose to tackle the problem at its roots. If we can get the economy growing on a sound basis and if we can get inflation under control, the Government will not need to give people incentives to invest. Investment grew without those incentives because the economy was growing. The proposals of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East deal with the symptoms, whereas we are dealing with the root cause of the problem. The hon. Gentleman is supposed to be the bright young hopeful of the Labour party, but as I listened to him he seemed to be firmly rooted in the corporate state of the 1960s and 1970s—a concept that is utterly irrelevant to the problems of the 1990s.

Dr. Reid: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Parkinson: I was about to deal with the points made by the hon. Gentleman. He asked whether Cobden was now out of date. Cobden and the open trading system in which he believed have been the source of the growth in world prosperity since the war. There has been an explosion of trade in manufactures based on the very simple principle of lowering tariffs, removing barriers and encouraging trade. The renegotiation of the general agreement on tariffs and trade that is under way at present will extend to farming and services the rules that have proved so successful with goods. That is vital to the development of the world trading system. There is nothing more important to developed and developing countries than the removal of those barriers against goods and the establishment of the law of comparative advantage as the basis of our trading system.

Dr. Reid: The Secretary of State must not try to make truisms sound like profound revelations. I imagine that he is talking about the extensions of world trade in commodity production. That has been under way not since the war but since before the Napoleonic wars—since 1780. The hon. Gentleman mentioned inflation and said that he was getting to the root of the problem. If that is so why, after 11 years, is inflation higher now than it was in 1979?

Mr. Parkinson: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to my right hon. Friend this morning, he would have understood why. On that occasion we followed policies which his colleagues criticised because, in their view, they were not lax enough. We gave the economy a boost. Their criticism was that it was too little. As it emerged, the problem was that we gave the economy too much of a boost. The advice of the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends was totally and utterly wrong. We admit to an honest mistake and we are putting it right. The hon. Gentleman would have compounded that mistake. Indeed, the whole basis of the Labour party's policies when it was in government was consistently to go for growth, run the economy into the ground and hand over control for economic affairs to outside agencies such as the International Monetary Fund.

My hon. Friends the Members for Surbiton (Mr. Tracey) and for Streatham (Sir W. Shelton) raised detailed questions about their constituencies and I shall write to them personally within the next week.

Twice in the past two days the Government have given evidence of the high priority that they attach to transport and of the practical and purposeful way in which they are dealing with our transport problems. Those two occasions were in the Gracious Speech and in the autumn statement. On the first, the Government announced their plans for four major and worthwhile Bills. That is the largest number of Department of Transport Bills that have been in the programme for many years. On the second occasion, the Chancellor revealed spending plans under which the Department will preside over its biggest-ever investment programmes.

I shall give the House the scale of the figures. In the three years which ended in April 1990, £8 billion was invested. In the three years beginning in April, as a result of the agreement with the Treasury last year, the figure was increased to £14 billion. As a result of the latest round, in the three years beginning next April, £16 billion will be invested in programmes for which my Department is responsible. Those figures are made up of record investment programmes across the board on rail, underground, public transport, local and national roads and air traffic control. I might add that, at the same time as public programmes are under way, the private sector will invest in airports—which have been privatised as BAA—the second Dartford crossing, and in our railways, where privately owned assets which use our railways now total a staggering £3,000 million worth.

The legislative programme has three aims, the first of which is to improve road safety. I thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East for supporting that part of our programme. I agree with him that the North report identifies some useful answers to a horrific problem. We have the safest roads in Europe, but even so, 100 people every week are killed and thousands more are injured. We have the equivalent of three Clapham train disasters on our roads every week. One of the most unfortunate aspects of that is that while our record is better than that of most other countries in every other respect, on child pedestrians we are among the worst. So we need to strengthen the law to deal with the dangerous and drunken driver. That is why our first Bill, which will implement North, will introduce tougher penalties for people who drive dangerously and drink. It will enable us to use modern technology to catch up with those who break the law and it should lead to better measures to tackle those who heedlessly kill and maim other people. I am glad that the House supports that measure.

The second aim of the legislative programme is to get better use out of our existing roads. This is tackled in two of the Bills; one on traffic and the other on new roads and street works. The road traffic Bill will introduce the red route scheme whereby 300 miles of arterial roads in London will become red routes, effectively parking-free or tightly controlled parking areas. The hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) spoke about the problem of Islington and the arterial route there. As he probably knows, Islington is our agent in handling the roads in its borough. It was asked to resurface this stretch of road in the spring of this year. It has only just come forward with its proposals, despite a lot of pressure. It is effrontery of a high order for it, having failed to carry out its duty, then to criticise us, because the fact that it is nearly a year late doing its job means that there will be a delay on the red routes. A period of decent silence, rather than using this as an excuse to attack the Government, would not have come amiss. That is a good argument for not continuing to use Islington as our agent.

The Bill will have a proposal for a traffic director for London who will manage and control the red routes and advise about parking. Part of the plan is to transfer to the borough responsibility for legitimate parking—meters and

[Mr. Parkinson]

so on—leaving traffic wardens and police free to enforce the rules on criminal parking, particularly on the red routes. We intend, having made more capacity on those 300 miles of roads, to ensure that buses get their fair share of that extra capacity because we recognise that buses are our only underused transport facility.

The new roads and street works Bill will, we hope, command wide support. I was glad that the hon. Member for Newham, North-West mentioned it. Better co-ordination of the digging up of our roads, making sure that they are reinstated properly and promptly to a high standard, avoiding unneccessary works and penalising the utilities that are dilatory and inefficient will enable us to get better use of our existing system.

Our third aim in the legislative programme is to increase the scope for private sector investment in the transport system. In the roads and street works Bill, we shall have proposals to enable the private sector to finance, build and operate new roads and to charge tolls. There is a place in the system for such investment, but one important point needs to be made. The Government have made it clear from day one that any funds attracted into the road system in this way will be in addition to, not a substitution for, our public sector programme. They will bring extra resources into an area where we need them badly.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Bill make provision for allowing existing roads to be privatised along the lines of the system in the United States? Could people in Hampstead get together and have their road declared a private road and then operate it as a private road?

Mr. Parkinson: That is not part of our plans, but we may need to link public roads to the proposed private roads. This will happen only as part of the process of linking privately financed roads into the road network, not as part of implementing any general principle.

The Bill will enable us to attract more private money into the financing of improvements to our road system. For example, we plan to attract more private money into the financing of the Severn bridge. The scheme has been let and the new Severn bridge will get under way when the House approves the Bill that the Government will introduce. As part of the aim of improving private sector investment, we plan to produce a Bill to enable trust ports to come forward with schemes for their privatisation.

We believe that that is a vital part of improving our port structure. I think that the entire House recognises now that getting rid of the dock work labour scheme led to a major improvement in our transport system. The trust ports are now hampered, however, by their own almost mediaeval structure. It is difficult for them to enter into joint ventures and to raise the money that they need to develop themselves. It is as part of the process of modernising our ports and improving them that we are coming forward with a trust ports Bill.

Within our legislative programme will be the planning and compensation Bill, which will be introduced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. It will enable additional compensation to be paid to those whose homes are blighted as a result of road or rail schemes. I believe that the Bill will be welcomed generally, and especially by my hon. Friend the Member for Wanstead and Woodford (Mr. Arbuthnot) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), both of whom have campaigned hard for such a measure for some time. I hope that they are pleased that the Government will be recognising the rightness of their case by introducing the measure.

That is only part of the story. Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer revealed the Government's public expenditure programmes for the next three years. As I have said, we plan to spend £16 billion over that period. For the benefit of the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East, who spends most of is time living in a dream land and making imaginary investments with non-existent money, I repeat that £16,000 million will be invested over the next three years. That is an all-time record for my Department. It will see an improvement across the spectrum of transport investment. The hon. Gentleman is always wrong when he talks about figures. Last year's investment programme for British Rail was the highest for 25 years. We have had continually growing investment programmes in transport as the economy has strengthened. We have now made a step change and we are moving forward into a huge investment programme across the spectrum.

The rail investment programme will rise to more than £4 billion, the highest for more than 30 years. It will be 58 per cent. higher in real terms than the programme for the previous three years. Of the £4 billion, £1·4 billion is to enable British Rail to prepare for the Channel tunnel, including £330 million of investment in freight facilities. The balance of £2·6 billion will be spent on improving the existing railway. That includes the completion of the east coast main line electrification programme to Edinburgh, massive investment in the regional network and the gradual introduction of new trains so that by 1993-94 virtually every train in the provincial fleet will be modern diesel or electric multiple units.

In network SouthEast we have a massive investment programme. The bad news for the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East is that new trains will be delivered in increasing numbers, starting very early in 1991. Modern trains will be running over huge areas of the rail network in 1991 and 1992

The programme for the underground system has been expanded to over £3 billion. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East goes on and on about the public service obligation grant reduction of £80 million for Network SouthEast. Alongside the £80 million we shall be investing £1,200 million in modern stations, new trains and greater capacity so that Network SouthEast will be able to attract more customers. It will be able to reduce its costs beause it will be operating modern trains. That is how a gap can be bridged without increasing fares unduly. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull East can think only of subsidy. When the Labour Government were in power and subsidy was at its highest, British Rail's investment programme was at an all-time low. We should prefer the money to be invested in improving the system and attracting customers, rather than in bribing the customer and subsidising fares. More than £3 billion will be spent on the underground over the next three years. There will be two new lines. The docklands light railway will be extended and there will be a huge investment in the existing network to increase its capacity by about 20 per cent.

Both national and local roads will have increased programmes—national roads of £6 billion and local roads

of £2·4 billion. We watched with interest the manoeuvrings of the Labour party. The hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) began by saying that he would abandon the programme. He then said that it would be reviewed. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East then intervened. The Leader of the Opposition has made a sensible decision—he has put the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor) in charge of knocking their heads together and trying to get them both to talk sense.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed on Monday 12 November.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE

Ordered,

That the provisions of paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 84 (Constitution of standing committees), paragraph (1) of Standing Order No. 86 (Nomination of standing committees) and Standing Order No. 101 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.) shall apply to the draft Code of Audit Practice for England and Wales as if it were a draft statutory instrument; and that the said draft Code be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

St. Christopher's Hospice, Sydenham

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Wood.]*

2.30 pm

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): At the beginning of each parliamentary Session, it is customary for the two hon. Members who have been chosen to open the debate on the Address to describe their constituencies in some detail. In a similar position, I should have referred to the benefits that have flowed to the sick from two establishments in my constituency—the Wellcome research laboratory and St. Christopher's hospice. The research workers at the Wellcome laboratory have a remarkable record for producing drugs that combat disease and suffering, while St. Christopher's hospice has become an inspiration and an example to the rapidly growing hospice movement, both in this country and overseas.

I am especially grateful that, so early in the Session, I have been given the opportunity to discuss once again the financial problems facing St. Christopher's, a hospice in which I know that you, Mr. Speaker, take a great interest. For the first 23 years of its life, the driving force behind St. Christopher's has been Dame Cecily Saunders, the only saint I know who was educated at Roedean. For those 23 years, it has been her energy, humour and faith that has inspired St. Christopher's. Like Florence Nightingale, she holds the Order of Merit; and like Florence Nightingale, I expect that her reputation will survive for generations.

When I first raised the subject of St. Christopher's in June 1988, the hospice faced a financial crisis following the last major increase in nurses' pay. Those problems have not gone away; in fact, they have grown. However, I am happy to say that the hospice movement as a whole has grown.

I shall put the matter in perspective. In June 1988, there were 124 hospices in the United Kingdom, with 2,000 beds; by June 1990, there were 145 hospices, with 2,600 beds. They are supported by 277 home care teams and 115 day care units. More than 30 further projects are planned. The National Health Service provides, on average, rather more than one third of the funding. Of course, the demand for hospice care for terminally ill patients is growing rapidly. In St. Christopher's, the work load has grown by 10 per cent. during the past year.

Even greater than the growth of in-patient care has been the demand for home care. In 1986, St. Christopher's looked after 50 patients in their own homes at any one time. In October 1990, the number receiving home care exceeded 100 for the first time, and in January 1991, the hospice will expand its work in south Croydon, bringing a further increase of 25 per cent. in home care work.

The hospice also hopes to open a new day centre by Christmas, which will look after between 15 and 20 patients each day, not only providing essential therapy but giving families at home a much-needed break and an opportunity to recharge their batteries.

Ten years ago, in 1980, St. Christopher's received 50 per cent. support from the National Health Service and needed to raise £250,000 in donations to break even. In 1990, even after the hospice received its share of the extra £8 million for hospices announced by my hon. Friend the Minister for Health on 15 December 1989, National Health Service support will meet only 38 per cent. of St.

[Sir Philip Goodhart]

Christopher's expenditure, and donations of £2·5 million are needed. St. Christopher's is by far our largest local charity—virtually every club, pub and organisation in the community raises funds for it—but the cost of the services provided by St. Christopher's next year will push expenditure close to £5 million.

Looking at hospices other than St. Christopher's, I note that, even with the extra £8 million announced by my hon. Friend the Minister, it seems inevitable that there will be some bed closures and cut in services unless the Government provide further funding. St. Oswald's in Newcastle, St. Michael's in Hastings, and Butterwick hospice in Cleveland face particular problems, while Michael Sobell house in Oxford, in which I also have a personal interest, has closed four beds, with further cuts threatened.

With the introduction of health service reforms, hospices will be required to negotiate contracts with individual authorities. St. Christopher's is notably well administered, but that new arrangement is bound to increase its administrative problems, as it will have to agree contracts with no fewer than 10 separate district health authorities.

In the debate on 23 June 1988, I called for 50 per cent. support from the National Health Service for St. Christopher's and all hospices. I was delighted when, on 7 October 1989, my hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for health matters in Scotland announced that that would happen in Scotland, and that the Government would match pound for pound public support for Scotland's 13 hospices. He said:

"Hospices are a splendid example of partnership in health care. The movement is well-established and has been recognised for many years as providing an integral part of the care for cancer patients.

I cannot stress strongly enough the importance I attach to supporting hospices and ensuring that they are equipped to face the challenges of the future, confident in the belief that they will be able to maintain and further improve upon the already high standards of patient care that they offer.

We must acknowledge the expertise that hospices have in the care of the terminally ill and assist the hospice movement to improve and develop its services and encourage the growth of locally based services.

Therefore, I intend making funding available to match, pound for pound the support given by the public. This will result in a substantial increase in the amount of public funding provided to hospices.

Working for patients is the watchword. The terminally ill and their families deserve as much care and support as we can possibly give them. The hospice movement has proved its worth, and in this very worthy area of service, and I am very pleased to be able to share in carrying their burden."

That was a splendid announcement. In implementing this 50:50 funding scheme, there have been some problems, as one would expect, but in the seven months that the scheme has been in operation, I note that individual donations have increased. As one might expect, the reality of the Government doubling gifts has encouraged benefactors. I was also encouraged by the Minister of Health's statement on 15 December last year, when she said:

"The Government's objective is to work towards a position in which the contribution from public funds available to voluntary hospices and similar organisations matches that of voluntary giving. This will provide a clear basis on which to plan ahead."—[*Official Report*, 15 December 1989; Vol. 163, c. *847*.]

Yesterday, the Chancellor of the Exchequer was able to announce another massive increase in funding for the national health service. As the Secretary of State for Health said yesterday:

"Next year the NHS in the United Kingdom will get the biggest ever year on year increase in resources. The service will have £3·2 billion more to spend than this year. This is an increase of 11·6 per cent. or 5·3 per cent. after allowing for inflation."

Fifty:fifty funding for hospices in the United Kingdom will cost approximately £15 million. Yesterday afternoon we were talking of sums in excess of £3 billion. I hope that today, or in the near future, the Minister will be able to come to the Dispatch Box and say that he can take extra steps towards 50:50 funding, which we are all agreed is a sensible objective.

2.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Stephen Dorrell): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Sir P. Goodhart) on the fact that, for the third time in four years, he has drawn the attention of the House to the history of St. Christopher's hospice in his constituency and to the fact that it is a shining example that not only should be, but has been, followed on many occasions and by many people who are interested in the subject in different parts of the country and of the world.

My hon. Friend may remember that on both previous occasions he had the good fortune to start his debate before the time for the introduction of such business and therefore got more than his half hour. On this occasion he was limited to 15 minutes, but used his share of time with the grace and skill of an accomplished and experienced parliamentarian.

In his introductory remarks my hon. Friend drew attention to your own interest in this subject, Mr. Speaker. It was also drawn to my attention by my Department, and if my hon. Friend had looked behind him, he could have drawn attention to the interest of my hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims); he and I were able to discuss the matter briefly before the debate.

I echo the tributes paid—not only by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham, but by my two predecessors who answered the two earlier debates—to St. Christopher's and all that has been done there since its establishment. As my hon. Friend said, the enormous progress that has been made in the development of palliative care is, in a very real sense, attributable to the example of St. Christopher's, and especially to the guiding light of that institution, Dame Cicely Saunders. Her work there, and the institution that she established, have come to represent an international beacon of excellence in palliative care. The lessons learnt there have been widely applied, both in the voluntary hospice movement and in wider thinking about palliative terminal care in our own health service and in other health care systems around the world.

Dame Cicely's efforts, and those of the dedicated staff who have worked at St. Christopher's since its establishment, have brought a sense of peace and well-being to thousands of dying people, and—perhaps equaly important—to their relatives and friends. They have established new standards of excellence in palliative care. Her work has been founded on the principle that, although a doctor may tell a patient, with rational and

clinical detachment, "I am sorry, there is no more that I can do for you", that should not be the end of health care and the caring professions. People who are concerned for the well-being of patients and their families want to ensure that dying people—and their relatives and friends—have the best possible support and quality of life.

One of the major benefits of this concept has been a much greater openness in the discussion of death, and of the conditions and support that can be provided to people as they approach it. The support that we give can reduce the natural dread of dying that we all feel, and encourage us to think less about dying from cancer and more about finding a way of living with it in the days that are left to us.

Since the launch of St. Christopher's in 1967, the hospice movement has mushroomed nationally and internationally. The lessons not merely learnt but demonstrated at St. Christopher's have been applied in similar institutions elsewhere in the world. It is an enormous tribute to those who have been involved in that endeavour from the beginning that their ideas are now so widely applied—and, indeed, regarded as the norm in the care of terminally ill patients.

Having demonstrated the Government's recognition of the importance of the work done at St. Christopher's, I should like to trace the history of the Government's thinking about the development of terminal care. Since 1980, as we can show, official thinking has developed—perhaps not as fast as Dame Cicely Saunders's might have, but we have progressed in our own pedestrian and official way.

In 1980, one of my predecessors set up a working group under Professor Eric Wilkes to examine this subject and to report on the development of care of the terminally ill.

The working group's report stated:

"Terminal care is not a matter of new buildings or expensive equipment. It depends primarily on enlightened professional attitudes. Our objective now should be to ensure that every dying patient has access to professional staff who can provide the appropriate care."

The working group's recommendation was this:

"The way forward is to encourage the dissemination of the principles of terminal care throughout the health service and to develop an integrated system of care with emphasis on co-ordination between the primary care sector, the hospital sector and the hospice movement."

That was the basis on which we began to develop our official thinking.

As a consequence of the report, the Department convened a conference in December 1985 which was opened by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who until a week ago was my boss in the Department of Health, delivered a speech in which he said:

"I would like to see every health authority drawing up comprehensive plans for providing services for those facing death. This means looking carefully at the range and type of specialist care which is needed in their district and, where possible, working with local and national voluntary groups to provide the necessary services."

It was the first time that a Minister made explicit the Government's wish that the NHS should work with the voluntary sector and apply the lessons learnt by the hospice movement.

Thinking has moved on further since then. In January 1987, the National Association of Health Authorities in England and Wales published a guide that it distributed to its members on the practice of care for the dying. In February 1987, the Department of Health issued a circular that set out the Department's official thinking on terminal care. It contained the important statement, for the first time, that

"where a voluntary group provides a service that represents an essential element in a health authority's overall plans for terminal care, the health authority should agree with them a contribution to the costs of that service."

By 1987, therefore, official thinking had moved to the point where it wanted to apply the lessons learnt from the hospice movement. Moreover, the Department's official policy, set out in that circular to health authorities, was that where NHS patients ended their days in a hospice the NHS should make a contribution towards the cost of hospice care. That was a clear policy statement by the Department.

Our thinking has developed even further. In December 1989, my hon. Friend the Minister for Health announced for the first time a special grant of NHS funds to health authorities specifically to support care in hospices. My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham referred to the £8 million grant that was announced on that occasion. It represented the first explicit direction of central Government funds to hospice care and reflected the Government's view that it was important to make further progress towards reaching the objective that has been set out in the press release that was quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham: to ensure that official funds matched the funds flowing into the hospice movement from the voluntary sector. The sum of £8 million was made available because we recognised that we must make progress towards achieving that objective. It represented significant progress towards ensuring that official funds matched those raised by the voluntary sector from non-public resources.

Progress has been made in the development of official thinking, from regarding the hospice movement as an inspired voluntary movement somewhat separate from the health service to it being an important part of the health care package on which the health service has come to rely and which therefore, quite properly, expects a contribution from the health service.

My hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham recognised that and quoted extensively from the utterances of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Scottish Office, who has blazed a trail towards achieving the objective of official funds matching those raised by the private sector. I hope that my hon. Friend will not misunderstand me when I say that it is an attractive characteristic of the Scots that they regularly pioneer new ideas and approaches. My hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Mr. Forsyth) will particularly appreciate it when I say that the Scots, from Adam Smith onwards, have had a particularly pioneering approach to the development of new ideas.

We share the Scottish Office's commitment to matching the funds raised from the voluntary sector, but we must recognise that in the competition for resources within the health service in England, the pace that we have been able to set in achieving the objective has been somewhat less ambitious than the pace that the Scots have been able to achieve.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham on his impeccable sense of timing. This is only the second Adjournment debate since my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced the increases in public expenditure for the financial year 1991-92. I congratulate

[Mr. Stephen Dorrell]

my hon. Friend on making the first bid for the hospice movement in the internal redistribution process within the health service. We shall consider seriously what he has said and shall consider ways, if not in 1991-92, in future years, of delivering for the hospice movement the objective of ensuring sufficient official funds to match the funds raised by the voluntary sector.

I cannot give a commitment that we shall achieve that in 1991-92, but I assure my hon. Friend that his bid is the first in the hat and that it will be seriously considered. If we do not achieve it in the financial year 1991-92, the commitment still stands and we shall continue to seek ways of achieving the objective that we share with him.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 12 November 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENERGY

Offshore Oil Employees

1. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the blacklisting of offshore oil employees by oil companies and contractors.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Colin Moynihan): During unofficial offshore industrial action by contractors' employees in August a number of men "sat-in" on installations and consistently refused to comply with the offshore installation manager's instructions to return to shore. Some men did not leave until a court interdict was obtained. They were subsequently dismissed by their employers.

Mr. Sillars: Is the Minister aware that that is a wholly unsatisfactory statement? He appears to be entirely in the pocket of the oil companies and the contractors. Can he and the oil companies not yet accept that we are no longer in the era of masters and men when masters could do exactly as they wanted with working people? On this day of all days, which will be known as the Cullen day in Scotland, does he accept that he should talk not to the oil barons in their ivory towers and big limousines, but to the men and women who go out on to the oilfields and risk their lives? Is not it time that he called in the oil companies and told them to listen to the men and women's claim for trade union recognition and safety?

Mr. Moynihan: I wholly disagree with the hon. Gentleman's comments. It is vital that the actions of individual short-term or long-term contract workers on rigs should demonstrate that they are prepared to respond to the instructions of offshore installation managers. That they were prepared to ignore those instructions on this occasion does not lead me to the view that the hon. Gentleman reached. Naturally, all of us are concerned about anything that has an effect on the maintenance of good offshore industrial relations. The dispute is for the parties involved to settle.

Mr. Michael Morris: Is not it a fact that any of us who have been to any of these platforms must recognise that the success of production, research or work at whatever level depends on teamwork? Therefore, the key factor is that every member working on a platform should have confidence in his neighbour and should know that if an instruction is given, everyone will respond to it.

Mr. Moynihan: I completely agree with my hon. Friend's views.

Mrs. Fyfe: Does the Minister recall the Labour Front Bench getting in touch with him a few weeks ago on this very subject? Does he agree that it is vital to implement Labour's policy on those matters, which is that people should not be blacklisted because of trade union membership or activity, particularly when we think of the immense health and safety problems of the industry? Will the Minister agree to meet members of the anti-blacklisting campaign, which is supported by 80 members of various parties in the House, who are extremely worried about those matters in this industry among others?

Mr. Moynihan: The Labour Front Bench has not brought to my attention any details of a specific blacklist, but if it does, of course we shall look into it. The reality is that we have made inquiries of Shell regarding the offshore personnel records information system, which is unique to Shell. The important point, on which I wanted assurance from Shell, was that it would not pass on the names of any men who took part in industrial action on Shell installations to any other operator, and it has given me that undertaking.

Mr. Dobson: May I take up the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Mrs. Fyfe) and remind the Minister that my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Mr. Doran) has written to him on the specific issue of blacklisting?

My specific question is addressed to the Secretary of State. Will he take the opportunity presented by today's publication of the Cullen report into the Piper Alpha disaster to call together the operators, the contractors and the representatives of people who risk their lives every day working in the North sea to make a fresh start to achieve the good industrial relations that are necessary if those people are to have a safe working environment? Will he insist that the contractors and operators withdraw the sackings and abandon the blacklisting, which is a disgrace to both?

Mr. Moynihan: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will, of course, make a statement on the Cullen report later this afternoon. No doubt he will bear in mind the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised. If, by implication, he believes that my right hon. Friend, or anyone in the House of whatever political persuasion, does not put safety first, he is wholly misguided and wrong.

Exploration Wells

2. **Mr. Doran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many exploration wells were drilled in the United Kingdom continental shelf in the six months commencing 1 January 1990.

Mr. Moynihan: Fifty-six new exploration wells were started in the United Kingdom continental shelf in the period to which the hon. Gentleman refers. By the end of October the number had increased to 128, already the highest level of exploration drilling in any year since UKCS activity began.

Mr. Doran: The Minister and the Secretary of State are proud to boast about the level of exploration activity in the North sea. Later we shall have a statement from the

Secretary of State on the Cullen report, which will have expenditure implications for the oil industry. The Minister has had that report for three weeks. Has he considered what impact implementation of the Cullen report will have on further exploration activity in the North sea?

Mr. Moynihan: Of course, Ministers have considered that point in detail. My right hon. Friend will refer to that when he makes his statement later this afternoon.

Mr. Wallace: I welcome the news that the Minister has given about the increase in the number of exploratory drilling wells. Does he accept that that increased activity, together with the situation in the Gulf, improves prospects for North sea developments? Is he able to give any colour or detail to the House about a report in today's *The Times* of a further multi-million pound investment at the Sullom Voe terminal in Shetland?

Mr. Moynihan: I am not in a position to give further details along the lines requested by the hon. Gentleman. I can assure him, however, that the high level of exploration drilling activity looks set to exceed 200 wells for the first time this year. From the end of October the number of new wells is set to increase from 128, as recorded in my answer, to 181. We shall make an announcement on each new major find as soon as we can.

Oil Imports

3. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total volume of oil imports into the United Kingdom for each of the last seven years.

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): The total volume of oil imports into the United Kingdom for each of the years 1983 to 1989 inclusive, are, in million metric tonnes, 40·1, 53·5, 52·1, 56·4, 53·9, 54·2 and 58·1 respectively. However, for each of those years the volume of oil exports from the United Kingdom exceeded the level of imports.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In so far as the Government have raised £100,000 million in oil revenues in the past 10 years and gained thousands of millions of pounds in terms of benefit to the balance of payments, can they tell us where all that money has gone? Why was not part of it used to ameliorate conditions of exploration and drilling in the North sea?

Mr. Wakeham: In answer to the specific question about the North sea, it is clear that the level of activity is as high as it has ever been and that the level of capital investment is steadily going up. There is no lack of investment in the North sea. On the more general point raised, the hon. Gentleman will know that, as a result of many things, not least the revenues from the North sea, we have been able to spend far more on the health service—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—and on investment, we now have a higher standard of living and we are spending more on social services than before. Perhaps that is what is upsetting the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Michael Clark: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the oil that we get from the North sea is of a high quality and, because of that characteristic, we can trade it at a higher price per barrel than the oil that we bring in? Therefore, is not it true that by trading oil, we can make a profit for this country, not only because we export more than we import, but because we export high-quality oil?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is right. Crude oil imports account for about half of the United Kingdom's refinery throughput. As my hon. Friend is well aware, a similar proportion of United Kingdom crude oil is exported. The high proportion reflects the price differential —more than £2 a tonne—in favour of the United Kingdom because of the high quality of North sea oil.

Mr. Salmond: Does the Secretary of State think that Scotland has had value for money from the £100,000 million with which it has bankrolled the Government during the past 10 years? The Secretary of State will have noted the effect on the balance of payments of high oil prices and also that Shell and BP, announcing more than £1,000 million of excess profits last week, said that those would contribute to oil taxation. If that is so, why, in his autumn statement, did the Chancellor forecast a £100 million decline in oil revenues for this year? What has happened to the £1,000 million?

Mr. Wakeham: First, I do not go to Aberdeen as often as the hon. Gentleman, but I go quite often and it strikes me as a pretty prosperous part of the world. The only thing that baffles me is why anybody should have elected him in that part of the country, but that is a matter for them to decide, not for me. It is a lovely part of the world and pretty prosperous.

The stock adjustments included in the recently announced BP and Shell profits give rise to only paper increases in profits. We should also remember that the greater part of oil companies' stocks are held under Government direction—the companies do not have the discretion to dispose of such stocks and realise the profits in the paper increase.

North Sea

4. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by how much he expects the output of the North sea to grow between 1990 and 1995.

Mr. Moynihan: The output of North sea oil and gas taken together could hit an all-time peak in the mid-1990s.

Mr. Marshall: May I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, which illustrates one of the Government's many successes? Will he remind the professional pessimists that it can be only good news for Britain and oil-related employment in Scotland?

Mr. Moynihan: I totally agree with my hon. Friend. A record number of discoveries, substantial increased investment and the job opportunities that go with it, and the fact that it is a net exporter of oil, all make good news for Britain.

Mr. Robert Hughes: Does not the Minister recognise that much of the increased activity and the high volume of production is the result of a dedicated work force in the North sea? Therefore, will he ask his officials to brief him a bit more carefully about industrial relations, as his earlier answers showed that he has been signally ill advised? Is not he aware that the companies have said that industrial relations involve primarily contractors and unions and that when they got together and were on the point of

signing an agreement to allow the reinstatement of almost all those sacked, the oil companies vetoed it and said that they would not accept it? Is not that secondary action of the worst kind and is not the Minister ashamed that the companies should do that?

Mr. Moynihan: I agree with the hon. Gentleman's opening remark. Anyone analysing and assessing North sea successes should recognise that it is due to the outstanding competence of the work force. I disagree with the hon. Gentleman that, be it on safety or any other consideration, it is necessarily better to be unionised than non-unionised, which is not a relevant consideration. What is relevant is that the training and contribution to the development of the UKCS output is based on a high level of quality manpower and womanpower—with an increasing number of women working offshore. I am sorry, but I disagree with the hon. Gentleman and believe that the issue bears no relation to union recognition.

Mr. John D. Taylor: In an earlier reply, the Minister referred to the good news for Britain. What proposals does he have to make good news for the United Kingdom?

Mr. Moynihan: The right hon. Gentleman is right to point that out. What is good news for Britain in this case is good news for the United Kingdom as well.

Mining Subsidence

5. **Mr. Haynes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet the chairman of British Coal to discuss compensation for mining subsidence.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. Tony Baldry): My right hon. Friend and I meet the chairman of British Coal regularly to discuss all aspects of the coal industry.

Mr. Haynes: Why do the Government keep kicking this ball around and doing nothing about it? It took a question to the Prime Minister last week to get some movement —she gave me half a promise. I want to know whether the Minister will tell the chairman of British Coal in no uncertain terms that he must pull his finger out. I want a settlement of this business before he retires and before I retire—because we are both retiring.

Mr. Baldry: The fact that a coal subsidence Bill was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech does not rule out such a Bill being introduced this Session. We are determined and ready to bring forward such legislation as soon as parliamentary time can be found. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister observed to the hon. Gentleman only last week that last year 15 Bills were specifically mentioned in the Queen's Speech but by the end of the Session Parliament had passed 45. We look forward to the co-operation of the hon. Gentleman and of the Opposition in expediting the passage of those Bills in the Queen's Speech so that we shall have more parliamentary time in which to deal with this measure.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: I and my colleagues care just as much about the subsidence problems of our constituents as does the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes)—although perhaps with fewer histrionics—but he raises a perfectly valid point. I seek the Minister's reassurance that the delay in presenting a Bill to the House is merely because the Government want to consider exactly what British Coal plans to do over the next couple of months. If its plans are satisfactory, so be it. If not, I trust that a Bill will be brought before the House.

Mr. Baldry: I must make it clear that we are determined and ready to bring forward legislation as soon as parliamentary time can be made available, but I should also make it clear that we are making steady progress in advance of legislation. British Coal is shortly to introduce a scheme administered by the Chartered Institute of Arbitrators. The scheme will provide quicker, cheaper and simpler ways of resolving subsidence disputes. British Coal is determined henceforth to notify householders individually of its mining plans, which should alert householders to the possibility of subsidence damage and enable them to make claims earlier. The time limit for making claims has been clarified, and that clarification has been amplified by a new leaflet from the Department, 20,000 copies of which have been distributed since May. So much is being done to improve arrangements for compensation in advance of the legislation.

Mr. Skinner: Why does not the Minister acknowledge that there is support from the Opposition to get legislation on mining subsidence through, and that there are even Conservative Members who are only too happy to get it through? We shall give him a guarantee to get it through by March with no problem, so why does not he have the guts to give a guarantee that legislation will be introduced even though it was not included in the Queen's Speech?

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman will have heard my earlier comments; I have no doubt that the business managers will have heard his.

Mr. Tredinnick: I welcome my hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Brandon-Bravo), and point out that there is still considerable concern in Leicestershire, particularly in my constituency, about subsidence. Roads regularly subside there. So the prospect of a Bill is exciting for my constituents. In the meantime the continuing process of improvements to the existing arrangements that he has outlined.

Mr. Baldry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I have no doubt that there is support for a coal subsidence Bill right throughout the House, as evidenced by the comments of the hon. Members for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) and for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) and others, for which I am grateful. As I said, we are determined and ready to bring forward that legislation as soon as parliamentary time is made available. In the meantime we shall continue to make steady progress in advance of legislation on improving the situation with regard to coal mining subsidence.

Mr. Barron: The Government recently published their observations on the recent report on mining subsidence by the Select Committee on Energy. In their observations the Government reject a subsidence advice centre, recommended by the Committee, because they say that they are quite happy with the British Coal scheme that the Minister has just announced. Is the Minister happy about the way in which British Coal has been running its mining subsidence estate offices, especially in the midlands coal area? If those offices continue to be run in the same way, will the Minister introduce an advice centre that is

independent of British Coal to which people can go for what they believe to be accurate and independent advice rather than having to seek advice from someone who has been the principal participant in the damage?

Mr. Baldry: We were grateful to the Select Committee on Energy for its report on coal mining subsidence, to which the Government have responded positively. The hon. Gentleman should distinguish between the statutory and non-statutory remedies that might be available. We take issue about whether an advice centre should be part of a statutory framework. I hope that I have shown in my earlier answers that in some areas we think that we can make non-statutory progress as well.

Coal Mining Industry

6. **Mr. Knox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what has been the increase in labour productivity in the coal mining industry sinbce 1983-84.

Mr. Wakeham: British Coal is making good progress with productivity, which is up by over 80 per cent. from pre-strike levels. British Coal is again recruiting apprentices. In the week before last, British Coal and its work force achieved a best-ever productivity record of over 5 tonnes per man shift. Continuing productivity gains are essential and I belive that the industry has the technology, the investment and the will to succeed.

Mr. Knox: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is an impressive increase in productivity? Can he say how productivity in British coal mining compares with that of our major competitors?

Mr. Wakeham: The answer, as I have said, is that British Coal has enormously increased its productivity which is now as high as the productivity of any of our competitors. However, we must bear it in mind that geological differences have a considerable effect, as does opencast mining. Opencast mining is vital for British Coal's success, but, of course, countries with a substantial amount of opencast mining have better productivity than us.

Dr. Kim Howells: In the light of the magnificent increases in productivity, will the Minister look carefully at the large tonnages of imported coal to make sure that the prices are not subsidised by the Governments of the exporting countries, because such subsidies nullify the tremendous achievements of British coal miners?

Mr. Wakeham: I agree that we should be right to be concerned if there were evidence of highly subsidised imports of coal. Of course, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the matter is primarily for the European Commission and, from time to time, British Coal has lodged complaints. So far I have not seen a substantiated case of a large amount of coal from subsidised sources.

Electricity Privatisation

7. **Mr. McAvoy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he next expects to meet the chairmen of the 12 area electricity companies to discuss the effects of privatisation on less well-off consumers.

Mr. Baldry: The Government believe that all consumers will benefit from the privatisation of the electricity industry.

Mr. McAvoy: The Minister will recall that the Secretary of State has devised a system whereby domestic electricity consumers will face price increases of at least 11 per cent. next year. That increase is based on the October retail prices index plus 1 or 2 per cent. Does he also recall that those who buy electricity shares will be protected from those increases by the award of vouchers that can be used to offset their electricity bills? Will he undertake for this year only to extend the voucher system to all less well-off consumers so that electricity privatisation does not further deepen the divisions in our society?

Mr. Baldry: The price controls on the industry are designed to protect customers against increases over and above the rate of inflation subject to unforeseen circumstances until 31 March 1993. In the past five years, domestic prices have fallen by about 5 per cent. in real terms.

I think that the hon. Gentleman is slightly confused about the electricity vouchers. The incentives that include electricity vouchers are part of the Government's marketing campaign for the share offers. The cost of those incentives is met by the Government, from the proceeds of the sales, and not by the regional electricity companies or the consumer. The price of electricity is set by the companies and will be the same whether or not incentives are offered.

Mr. Mans: As many less well-off people rely wholly on electricity for their heating, may I ask my hon. Friend what steps have been taken to guarantee the supply of electricity and to discourage disconnections under the new privatised regime?

Mr. Baldry: I am glad to say that disconnections for debt now represent only 0·33 per cent. of all customers. That is the lowest-ever level, and is less than half that in 1976. Indeed, previous protections against disconnections are being not only retained but enhanced, because licences require each regional electricity company to produce a code of practice to help those finding difficulty in paying bills and to draw up procedures to deal with customers who fall into debt.

Electricity Supply Industry

9. **Mr. John Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what provisions govern the operation of the electricity supply industry during an energy crisis, following privatisation.

Mr. Baldry: When an Order in Council has been made under section 3 of the Energy Act 1976, the Secretary of State has power under sections 1 and 2 to control the production, supply, acquisition or use of electricity and to give directions. Under section 34 of the Electricity Act 1989, the Secretary of State may give directions to generators regarding the operation of power stations.

Mr. Evans: Will the Minister confirm that the electricity privatisation prospectus makes it clear that, in the event of an emergency—such as a war breaking out in the Gulf —the Secretary of State will have power literally to take the industry back into public ownership? Would not it be

better, in those circumstances—at least until the problems in the Gulf have been resolved—for the privatisation to be deferred. especially as it could save thousands of small investors from the risk of getting their fingers badly burnt?

Mr. Baldry: The hon. Gentleman is trying to confuse two issues. There have always been plans for dealing with electricity supply emergencies and the Government have clear statutory powers to ensure that the industry operates as effectively as possible in an emergency. There is a comprehensive strategy and framework to cover any such contingency, as my earlier reply made clear.

As for any incidents that may arise in the Gulf, the Government have taken the view that it is not reasonable for investors to be exposed to Gulf war risks. That is why the Government have acted as they have. Let me make it clear, however, that a war clause would not relieve the underwriters of any of the normal risks that they are paid to bear, such as market movements for other reasons. The hon. Gentleman must not confuse two entirely separate issues.

Mr. Stern: Does my hon. Friend agree that the greatest benefit that the industry can gain at a time of crisis is ready and flexible access to capital? Does he agree that the apparent huge success of the privatisation of the supply industry is in itself a guarantee that the industry will in future be able to meet any conceivable crisis?

Mr. Baldry: My hon. Friend makes his point very well.

Mr. Morgan: The Minister has just told the House what we all learnt from the press on Friday: that the Secretary of State has had to climb down in a most humiliating manner by allowing the underwriters of the issue, not him, to decide whether to pull the issue in the event of a Gulf crisis. It is not normally the function of the Government to give up their role to underwriters from the City. Does the Secretary of State now agree that he has a moral duty to cease the "Frank N. Stein" advertising campaign, which is designed to lure in the financially unsophisticated? Does he accept that what is good for the City must be good for the Sids as well?

The Secretary of State will be retiring at the end of this Parliament: the man who sold tickets for the last trip of the SS Titanic did not get a good press, and nor will the Secretary of State unless he agrees to cancel this disgraceful advertising campaign.

Mr. Baldry: With all respect to the hon. Gentleman, I must say that his question was a lot of drivel. The campaign for registrations has been outlined, it is going well and a large number of people have registered their interest in buying shares in a privatised electricity supply industry. In due course, they must rely upon their own judgment as to whether it is a sensible investment, having regard to all the information available at that time.

My right hon. Friend's decision on force majeure was sensible and straightforward. It was taken on the advice of the Government's financial advisers, having regard to all the circumstances. It is a poor reflection on the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends if they consider such a mature and sensible decision as in some way being a climbdown.

Energy Efficiency

10. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the rate of improvement in energy efficiency in the United Kingdom and other European countries.

Mr. Baldry: Between 1983 and 1988, the United Kingdom reduced its energy intensity—the ratio of energy consumption to GDP—by an average of 2 per cent. per year. This is more than twice the rate of improvement in the European Community as a whole over the same period.

Mr. Davis: My hon. Friend's answer is excellent news for British industry in a European context. However, in the wider context, how has the United Kingdom compared with our better international competitors, such as Japan? To what extent has the Government's Energy Efficiency Office contributed to that development? Will he assure the House that the Government's commitment to energy efficiency will continue?

Mr. Baldry: I am glad to say that according to the OECD—its figures, not ours—since 1983 United Kingdom energy intensity has fallen faster than that of most of our competitors, including Japan, which is regarded as the world's most efficient nation. I am also glad to say that the Energy Efficiency Office programme alone has, to date, achieved recurring annual savings now worth more than £500 million a year.

Mr. Hardy: If one destroys large parts of industry, inevitably a great deal is achieved in energy conservation. Some countries have not pursued that option.

Will the Minister explain the latest inconsistency in the Government's position on energy conservation? How can the Prime Minister make some extremely fine remarks at the world climate conference, emphasising the Government's commitment to energy conservation, while in Brussels, the Minister's Department seeks to be obstructive and to oppose sensible and effective energy conservation measures that appear to be required by the very European countries that the hon. Gentleman criticises?

Mr. Baldry: Gross domestic product in the United Kingdom has increased by 25 per cent. in real terms since 1979, while energy consumption has remained almost unchanged. We are producing substantially more national wealth with virtually no additional energy consumption.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, I imagine that he is relying on a somewhat tendentious article in *The Observer* yesterday. The facts contained in that article are untrue. We are carrying forward the White Paper commitments on appliance labelling, not retreating from them. We are consulting the industry and consumer organisations about a voluntary scheme. We are arguing the case in Brussels for a voluntary scheme across the Community and I am glad to say that Britain's proposals were well received at last week's meeting. We believe that minimum standards should be the basis of a labelling scheme.

At a recent meeting that I convened in the Department, it was made clear that the Department's proposals for a labelling scheme were similar to those put forward by organisations such as Friends of the Earth. I am glad to tell

the hon. Gentleman that we are determined to take forward an effective appliance labelling scheme as soon as possible.

Renewable Energy

11. **Mr. Butler:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what recent initiatives he has taken to encourage the development of renewable energy sources.

Mr. Moynihan: The Government are establishing an equitable legislative and administrative framework for renewables to compete with other sources of energy. The main focus is the non-fossil fuel obligation under the Electricity Act 1989. Seventy-five renewables projects comprise the initial order laid in September, which will bring to 250 MW the level of renewables-sourced electricity generating capacity in England and Wales.

Mr. Butler: Will my hon. Friend update the position regarding the Mersey barrage, which has the potential to generate £1 million worth of clean renewable energy every week?

Mr. Moynihan: The Government are supporting a two-phase programme of studies that is being carried out by the Mersey Barrage Company. The cost of phases 1 and 2 is £2 million, to which the Department of Energy is contributing 50 per cent. We are giving all the support possible to the Mersey Barrage Company to ensure that its officials have an opportunity to consult officials from a range of Departments to consider effective cost-benefit analysis. I hope that the project will be economically viable and technically feasible.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Law Centres

26. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement about the Government's policy on the funding of law centres.

The Solicitor-General (Sir Nicholas Lyell): Law centres are funded principally by local authorities, supplemented by payments received from the Legal Aid Board for specific work carried out under the legal aid scheme. In addition, seven law centres continue to be funded by grants from the Legal Aid Board.

Mr. Fraser: Will the Solicitor-General reaffirm the general support that he and his colleagues gave to law centres during consideration of the Courts and Legal Services Bill? Will he confirm that it is appropriate for law centres to do work other than legally aided work, such as prosecutions under the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 and tribunal cases? Will he do something, even at this late stage, to save the three law centres that are threatened with closure by Wandsworth borough council?

The Solicitor-General: I can reaffirm our general support for the good work done by many law centres throughout the country. As the hon. Gentleman realises, the funding of a law centre in a particular area is a matter for the local authority and it has been a cause of controversy among local authorities backed by all political parties.

Crown Prosecution Service

27. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Attorney-General what action he has taken and proposes to take in response to the recent report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs on the future of the Crown prosecution service.

The Solicitor-General: The Government's response to each recommendation of the Select Committee on Home Affairs was laid before the House on 17 July this year. Good progress is being made in implementing the many recommendations that have been accepted.

Mr. Greenway: The Crown prosecution service has a formidable workload. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, in the light of the Government's proposals for community sentencing, we can divert more young offenders from courts by the use of cautions? Does he further agree that if, as the Committee recommended, we could extend the use of cautions to allow the police to administer penalties, such as reparation or compensation for damage or theft from victims, that would not only strengthen the deterrent effect of community service and cautions but divert young offenders from the courts and reduce the workload of the CPS?

The Solicitor-General: The Government recognise the value of cautioning in appropriate cases. One advance since the Government gave their response to the report of the Select Committee on Home Affairs was the issuing of a Home Office circular on national standards for cautioning. My hon. Friend raises a separate and extra question about penalties being imposed by the police. He will recall that that was dealt with in our response. Policy is a matter for the Home Secretary, but our response said that penalties were not for the police but for the courts.

Mr. Vaz: The Solicitor-General will recall that in oral evidence to the inquiry the Director of Public Prosecutions made the astonishing claim that members of the police force at all levels were obstructing the work of the Crown prosecution service. Have any discussions taken place between himself and the Home Secretary about those claims? Has co-operation between the police and the CPS improved since that report?

The Solicitor-General: I remember fairly well reading of the part played by the hon. Gentleman during the oral hearings. I did not take part in them, so I am not sure what he is talking about.

Mr. Vaz: The right hon. and learned Gentleman should have read the report.

The Solicitor-General: I read the hon. Gentleman's words—they were fairly extensive, as usual. The interdepartmental working group on pre-trial issues, which is examining the crucial working arrangements between the police and the CPS, is maintaining its tight timetable and will report to the Director shortly.

Mr. Holt: A 73-year-old constituent of mine was knocked down on a zebra crossing between her church and her church hall. Although the CPS knew that the driver was speeding at the time, it did not bring sufficiently serious charges for the matter to be dealt with by the High Court. The magistrates decided, in their infinite wisdom, to impose a fine and allowed the points that would

automatically have taken the taxi driver into disqualification to be taken concurrently with the penalties applying to his previous offences so that he was not disqualified from driving. If such actions are allowed to continue, will not faith in the CPS be totally eroded?

The Solicitor-General: I understand my hon. Friend's anxiety about particular cases, but I invite the House to remember that we live in a society in which prosecutions are a matter for the independent prosecuting authorities and penalties are wholly a matter for the independent courts which try each case.

Birmingham Pub Bombings

28. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Attorney-General when he next expects to meet the Director of Public Prosecutions to discuss the appeal of the six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: I meet the Director of Public Prosecutions frequently to discuss matters of departmental interest.

Mr. Mullin: The six men convicted of the Birmingham pub bombings now face their 17th Christmas in prison for offences of which many people believe they were entirely innocent. The Home Secretary acted with commendable speed in August in referring the case back within two days to the Court of Appeal. The Director of Public Prosecutions has so far taken three months to set a timetable for the appeal to take place. When will that appeal take place?

The Solicitor-General: The date of the appeal is primarily a matter for the court, subject to its listing arrangements. The court can be expected to hear the matter once all parties are ready. As the hon. Gentleman should, and probably does, know, since my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary referred the case on 29 August, it has been necessary to collect and collate an enormous mass of written material. About 130 files have fairly recently been disclosed to the defence after careful collation, together with important scientific evidence concerning the electrostatic evidence which was the basis of my right hon. and learned Friend's reference and further important evidence in relation to the handling of explosives.

Mr. Mullin: When?

The Solicitor-General: The matter will be brought before the court when the defence has had the opportunity to assimilate that material.

Mr. Mullin: The defence is ready.

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman should listen to the answer. It is rather foolish of him to say that the defence is entirely ready when it has just received a large bundle of material which it will wish to look at extremely carefully before bringing the matter before the court. The material is with the defence and the matter can now proceed.

Mr. Stanbrook: If the evidence of all criminal trials were to be as thoroughly examined as in this case, no one would ever remain convicted.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This matter is sub judice, as the hon. Gentleman should know, and he should therefore be very careful what he says.

Mr. Stanbrook: Is it right that we should try so hard to discredit our own system of justice?

The Solicitor-General: We have a careful system which includes the power of the Home Secretary in appropriate circumstances to refer a case again and, in exceptional circumstances, for a second time, to the Court of Appeal. The case has been referred to the Court of Appeal. It is, of course, sub judice, and it will be heard as soon as the parties are ready and the court gives a date.

Local Government Finance

29. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Attorney-General whether he proposes to appear in his official capacity in court in any poll tax case.

The Solicitor-General: I am not aware of any cases on the community charge currently before the High Court or Court of Appeal other than the Crown *v.* Leicester City Justices ex parte Barrow and Barrow. That case relates to the right of a charge payer defending proceedings for a liability order to have a friend, usually known as a McKenzie friend, in court. In that case, at the request of the court, the Attorney-General has appointed an amicus curiae to assist the court.

Mr. Cohen: But there are many poll tax cases before the magistrates at the moment. The Attorney-General and the Solicitor-General are the Government's chief prosecutors and, as everyone knows, the poll tax is a Government tax, so why are not the cases before those higher courts? Perhaps the Solicitor-General can explain why magistrates are ignoring people's pleas that they cannot pay and why they are ignoring the McKenzie ruling, which says that people can have someone sitting beside them to defend them, especially as the cases are dealt with so rapidly. One of the Government's legal officers said that about 2,500 cases are dealt with in a day in one court. Surely that denies people the right to speak in their own defence. Are not the Government running the legal system of a Saddam Hussein? Why has the poll tax been allowed to bring British justice to such a low point?

The Solicitor-General: That was an interesting question. Most taxes in a democracy are Government taxes—not many other people levy taxes—but the determination of cases in which people do not pay is a matter for the independent courts.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Saw Mill Projects

33. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what help is given to transportable saw mill projects.

The Minister for Overseas Development (Mrs. Lynda Chalker): We are supporting a project promoting the properly managed use of portable saw mills in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon islands and Vanuatu. We are ready

to consider other projects provided that the International Institute for Environment and Development review of the project is positive.

Mr. Bottomley: In addition to encouraging the turning of wood on islands into construction timber, which is of great advantage to the local people, will my right hon. Friend try to find ways of promoting ecological trading in planks from fine timber so that, instead of mass clearances which do no good to local people, we can have sustainable development in wood? The use of portable saw mills would allow that to happen rather than all the wood having to be dragged away in the form of trees.

Mrs. Chalker: One of the useful aspects of the walkabout saw mill project is the training that it provides in marketing, rotational felling in woods and environmental awareness which will prevent the very results that my hon. Friend fears. With the benefit of training, indigenous peoples will find that the projects are not only environmentally sound but avoid the need for mass felling, road building through forest areas, heavy extraction plant and everything that we dislike about large-scale wood felling.

Human Rights

34. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to link United Kingdom overseas aid to human rights observance.

Mrs. Chalker: The observance of human rights is an important factor which the Government take into account in allocating aid to developing countries.

Mr. Madden: Does the Minister accept that that reply will be extremely disappointing to many British people who fail to understand why British overseas aid should not be directly linked to human rights observance? Does she understand that there is great concern about human rights violations in Sri Lanka, the Punjab, Kashmir and many other places? Will she urgently consider adopting the suggestions being made in America and elsewhere that aid should be linked with human rights?

Mrs. Chalker: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I am already doing what he asks. The Government take the human rights record of aid recipients very seriously, but there are many other factors which we must consider at the same time, including a nation's poverty, the state of its environment and its population and health problems. One cannot consider human rights in isolation, but we never fail to consider them in making a decision.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: Is not it absolutely right and extremely important that a country's human rights observance should be a fundamental part of any development aid awarded by this Government? Will my right hon. Friend give us some examples of where the human rights record has played a fundamental part in the award of aid?

Mrs. Chalker: It is easier to say where, sadly, we have had to take action because the human rights record was so bad. In that respect I can name Somalia, Burma and Sudan. However, it is also important that we try not to hurt the ordinary people who are very vulnerable. That is why we often maintain humanitarian aid through non-governmental organisations and perhaps the United Nations when we cannot possibly continue to give Government-to-Government aid to countries where human rights are not respected.

Mr. Simon Hughes: With regard to the question by the hon. Member for Bradford, West (Mr. Madden), will the Minister make representations to the new Government of India in relation to human rights violations in the Punjab? We are aware that the Punjab is a small part of the area covered by the Indian programme, but, as it is the largest programme in the Government's overseas development effort, it would be appropriate for strong representations to be made as a matter of urgency given the allegations —which have been supported—of regular human rights violations.

Mrs. Chalker: We are extremely disturbed by the recent communal violence. It is too early to comment on whether the new Government will get to grips with the problem, but obviously we believe that they should. I hope that we will enjoy the same close relationship with the new Government so that we can talk frankly and help the Indian Government to bring about peace in those areas and a respect for human rights which is so essential.

Cambodia

35. **Mr. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what humanitarian aid has been provided for Cambodians over the past two years; and what plans he has for further provision of such aid.

Mrs. Chalker: In the past 18 months, the ODA has committed £565,000 supporting 12 NGO projects. A number of other NGO project proposals is being considered. We have also allocated £1·25 million for programmes carried out by the United Nations childrens fund, the World Food Programme and the World Health Organisation. In addition, up to £100,000 will be spent through British NGOs to help civil war displaced persons. Cambodia's humanitarian assistance needs are monitored regularly.

Mr. Lawrence: Is my right hon. Friend aware that that is a very encouraging answer? While a resolution to the political situation in Cambodia is unfortunately taking time, the Government appear to be getting on with humanitarian aid through the NGOs which is generous, highly effective and shows no sign of diminishing.

Mrs. Chalker: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend. However, we are not just involved in humanitarian aid. The friends of the co-chairmen's working group met at the weekend in Jakarta. We are working together with the permanent five under the chairmanship of the Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas and we are doing all that we can to bring about a meeting at which the co-chairmen can bring the Supreme National Council together. Until there is a peaceful solution in Cambodia, no matter how much money we put in or how much help we provide through the NGOs, we will not be able to bring peace to the people.

Mrs. Clwyd: Why does the Minister come here month after month offering limp and petty excuses for denying proper developmental aid to one of the poorest countries

in the world? Does the Minister realise that the United Nations General Assembly resolution on Cambodia, which was passed in October without dissent, calls on donor countries to provide resources for the economic and social reconstruction of Cambodia? When do the Government propose to implement that resolution which they signed and voted for?

Mrs. Chalker: As usual, the hon. Lady goes wide of the aid brief. However, we have always believed that the United Nations had to have a central role in restoring peace and stability to Cambodia. We have also given the humanitarian aid that we can put in. We now want to ensure that the co-ordinating committee in Paris thrashes out the details for a settlement. As soon as that is done, we shall be able to follow through on giving more help and aid to Cambodia which it needs for reconstruction.

Brazil

36. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will make a statement on Britain's environmental aid to Brazil following the recent visit of the Minister for Overseas Development.

Mrs. Chalker: During my three-day visit I signed agreements for two new environmental co-operation projects. I saw some of the serious urban environmental problems of Recife and Olinda in the north-east, where Britain provides technical co-operation. I opened the Anglo-Brazilian environmental conference, supported by ICI, on the theme of "Ecological Restoration for Forest Conservation" and I discussed environmental matters with Brazilian Ministers.

Mr. Burns: Does my right hon. Friend accept that her visit was particularly welcome as it highlights the importance given in this country to the question of tropical forests? What progress has been made under the memorandum of understanding with the Brazilian Government? Can my right hon. Friend mention any projects that are being developed under the agreements?

Mr. Chalker: Following the memorandum of understanding that was signed last year, our programme is making good progress. We have already agreed four projects at a cost of £4·6 million: the Institute of Hydrology climate research project; the Caxiuana research station; the Recife environmental control project; and aromatic plant development. We expect to approve shortly a further four projects, costing another £4 million. We are discussing a number of other proposals with the Brazilian authorities. One of the other major steps forward is to get our forestry adviser based permanently in Brasilia to monitor what is going on there on the ground.

Mr. Dalyell: What part are we to play in Project North-East in relation to the drylands?

Mrs. Chalker: That was precisely one of the subjects on which, when I came back from the north-east, I asked for more information and work. I discussed the matter with Mr. Lutzemberger and with Mr. Goldenberg. I hope that there may be work that we can do with the Brazilian Government, and indeed with governments of local states there, to try to bring some solutions to those very dry lands.

Piper Alpha

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Energy (Mr. John Wakeham): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement about the report of the public inquiry into the Piper Alpha disaster. My right hon. Friend and predecessor, the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Parkinson), the present Secretary of State for Transport, set up the public inquiry on 13 July 1988 and appointed Lord Cullen as its chairman. I am publishing his report today as a Command Paper, and copies are now available in the Vote Office.

I am sure that I speak for the whole House in expressing my deepest sympathy for the relatives and friends of the 167 men who lost their lives in this disaster. Our thoughts are no less with those who survived, but suffered physical or mental injury.

The House will also join me in paying tribute to the many people who gave unstintingly of their courage, skills and kindness in rescuing and aiding the survivors: crewmen of nearby vessels, helicopter crew, medical teams and hospital staff. The report draws particular attention to the bravery of the crews of the fast rescue craft and of the standby vessel.

Lord Cullen concludes that the intitial cause of the disaster was an explosion in Piper Alpha's gas compression module. He indentifies the underlying causes as failures of communication and weaknesses in mangement control. The initial explosion set in train an escalating series of fires that destroyed the installation. The death toll among those in the accommodation might have been significantly reduced if instructions had been given for personnell to escape from the accommodation by whatever means they could.

The primary responsibility for safety has always been, and will always remain, with the operator. Lord Cullen observes that there were significant flaws in the way in which safety was managed by Occidental. Senior management were too easily satisfied that safety was being maintained. Workers and management on the platform were not adequately trained and prepared for a major emergency. While the Department of Energy had regularly inspected Piper Alpha, and those inspections had shown up a number of deficiencies, including deficiencies for which Occidental had been successfully prosecuted, Lord Cullen felt that the existing system did not give sufficient emphasis to the auditing of Occidental's management of safety.

The main thrust of the report is thus to propose a new approach, under which the operator would retain the primary responsibility for safety, and would be required to prepare a comprehensive safety case. The regulator would be responsible for continuously reviewing the case. Lord Cullen believes that that is the best way to prevent any recurrence of such failings in the future, and the Government accept his conclusions.

In all, the report makes 106 recommendations, for improvements in the management of safety on offshore installations; design and equipment; planning and provision for emergencies, for evacuation, escape and rescue and for strengthening the involvement of the work force in safety.

The principal recommendation points to a fundamental change in the system for regulation of offshore safety. The new system should be based on requirements for operators of offshore installations to carry out formal and comprehensive safety assessments of their installations. Those should be presented to the regulatory body as a safety case, covering: the adequacy of the company's safety management system; the controls of potential major hazards, and the provision of temporary safe refuge, and of means for safe evacuation, escape and rescue, on each installation.

New installations should not commence operations until the safety case has been accepted by the regulator, and a safety case should be submitted in respect of existing installations as urgently as practicable. The report goes on to make recommendations on the content of the safety cases, for example, that the exposure of personnel to accidental events has been minimised, and on the criteria for acceptance.

As the analysis of the Piper disaster makes clear, it is of the highest importance that there should be a reliable assurance that the proper principles and measures of safety management are not only adopted, but consistently put into practice. The report therefore recommends that the operator himself should be required to confirm, by comprehensive and regular auditing, that his safety management system is being adhered to. The regulatory body should review and audit that critical activity.

The report makes recommendations for the overhaul of existing regulations on offshore safety, and for their replacement by new regulations which, in the main, should set goals to be achieved rather than prescribe specific measures. It is expected, however, that there will still be a need for some detailed prescriptive regulations.

The House will recall that the present arrangements for regulatory responsibility were instituted following the report in 1980 of an independent committee under Dr. J. H. Burgoyne. Lord Cullen has reviewed the allocation of those responsibilities in the light of the proposed new framework. His recommendation is that there should be a single regulatory body with a clear identity. That would deal with all aspects of offshore safety. On balance, he concludes that it should be located within the Health and Safety Executive. It should employ a specialist inspectorate with adequate resources to discharge its role.

The Government accept Lord Cullen's conclusions and recommendations. Arrangements have been put in hand to progress the necessary detailed work. I have written to the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission about the transfer to the executive of the responsibilities in respect of offshore safety for my Department's safety directorate, together with specialist personnel engaged in that work in my Department and the Department of Transport. I have sought the views of the commission on the proposed creation of the single regulatory body for offshore safety as a discrete division within the Health and Safety Executive. Subject to satisfactory completion of those arrangements, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has agreed that when they are implemented my responsibilities for offshore safety should be transferred to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Employment. The statutory responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport would not be affected.

In a number of areas, the report recommends immediate action by the industry. My director of safety has today written to the industry, asking it immediately to undertake the necessary action.

I take this opportunity to thank the professional staff who have aided me in the discharge of my responsibilities for offshore safety. I am confident that the energy and commitment that they have displayed will be great assets to the new system.

Finally, I should like to express my thanks to Lord Cullen, his assessors, and the many others who participated in the investigation, for the immense labour and dedication that went into their unprecedented and exceptionally difficult task. The Piper Alpha disaster was the most serious industrial accident in Britain in over 50 years. It was the most serious to occur anywhere in the history of offshore development. Its investigation was an altogether exceptional responsibility; and, because so much of the evidence was unrecoverable, it was also one of exceptional difficulty. I believe that Lord Cullen and his team proved equal to those challenges, and that his far-reaching and comprehensive recommendations will have a lasting influence on the safety of offshore operations hereafter.

The Government's concern throughout has been that the events should be properly probed and the lessons learnt as soon as possible. We have already taken important action to improve safety following my Department's technical investigation. That includes new regulations on the provision of emergency shutdown valves, the election of safety committees, and guidance on the priority areas for action by operators following the disaster. The Government are now acting to implement the recommendation for a new regulatory system, and to ensure that the lessons of this terrible event are fully learnt and thoroughly put into effect. Until the details of the measures that we shall take are fully worked out, it is impossible to determine the precise level of resources that will be required, but I assure the House that offshore safety will not be sacrificed through lack of resources.

The Piper Alpha disaster was an awful event, one which has been felt throughout the nation and around the world. Those of us who have seen it from afar can only offer our most sincere sympathy to those who were there, and to those who lost someone they loved. The measure of our sympathy is the determination, which I am certain is shared by the whole House, that nothing of this kind shall ever happen again.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): May I join the Secretary of State in offering condolences to those who were injured and bereaved by the Piper Alpha disaster and paying tribute to the people who helped save those who survived, but may I add that condolences and tributes are not enough? The 30,000 people who daily earn their living on North sea installations work and live in a profoundly hostile environment. They deal with raw energy in concentrations the magnitude and danger of which it is hard to comprehend. They produce oil and gas, the importance of which to the British economy is hard to exaggerate. We owe them more than tributes and condolences. We owe them the safest working conditions that can be obtained. Those people have been badly let down.

The Cullen inquiry revealed, for example, that on the fateful night of 6 July 1988 on the Piper Alpha platform life rafts would not inflate, automatic fire pumps were switched to manual control, and gas pipelines discharged yet more gas on to an already blazing platform. That night 80 million sq ft of gas exploded and burned. Taken together with the oil and other flammable materials, the release of energy must have approached the scale of the Hiroshima bomb and that occurred on what Occidental, the operators, said was a well-run platform.

Lord Cullen did not agree. He referred to failures in training, failures to resolve technical problems, superficial attitudes and deficient practice. If rules mean anything, Occidental must have broken them and it should be prosecuted. Will the Secretary of State confirm that Occidental is to be prosecuted, or will he tell us that Scotland is to join England as a country where a truthful, conscience-stricken, engine driver is sent to gaol while rich and powerful corporations go free?

The disaster probably resulted in part from shortcomings in the permit to work and handover arrangements. A previous failure led to a fatality in 1987. Occidental was prosecuted, yet it did not change those arrangements. Will the Secretary of State promise that action will be taken against all responsible for the Piper Alpha disaster and remember the old legal dictum, "Be you never so high, yet the law is above you"?

The responsibility for safety in the North sea is not just a matter for operators, their contractors and staff. It is the responsibility of Government. In 1980 the Burgoyne committee reported. It recognised that the ramshackle collection of regulations and the involvement of several agencies in North sea safety was a danger. It recommended a new goal-setting approach to North sea safety and that the Government should discharge their responsibility for offshore safety via a single Government agency whose task was to set standards and ensure their achievement. It stated that those tasks were so important and immediate that delay in dealing with them could not be allowed.

Can the Secretary of State confirm Lord Cullen's conclusion that between 1980 and the Piper Alpha disaster in 1988 virtually nothing was done to implement those Burgoyne recommendations, and can he tell us why? Will he tell us what was given a higher priority by his predecessor Secretaries of State for Energy? Was it the privatisation of Britoil and British Gas? If not, what was it that took priority in their minds over North sea safety?

Can the Secretary of State confirm that at the time of the Piper Alpha disaster there were 217 installations in the North sea? Can he confirm that, to inspect those 217 complex and often gigantic structures his Department employed just eight professional, full-time, field inspectors? Can he confirm that nine out of the 46 jobs in the safety section were vacant? Is it any wonder that Cullen finds that their investigations were

"superficial to the point of being of little use"

and that

"the inspectors were . . . inadequately trained, guided and led"?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that Lord Cullen finds that persistent undermanning undermined both the frequency and depth of inspections? Will he confirm that only 40 per cent. of even fatal and serious accidents were investigated? Will he confirm that, in the years up to 1988, the priorities of the Department of Energy were such that more was spent on publicity, advertising and public relations than on the North sea safety inspectorate? Will he confirm that the same applies to this very day?

While on the subject of spending priorities, will the Secretary of State now undertake to pay the legal expenses incurred in representing the relatives at the Cullen inquiry? Will he deplore the callous decision of his predecessor to

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expect those relatives to throw themselves on the mercy of Occidental, whose help with legal costs they proudly and rightly refused?

We welcome Lord Cullen's report and its recommendations. We look forward to an early opportunity for a full debate on them. We welcome Lord Cullen's endorsement of the Burgoyne committee's 1980 main recommendations and his acceptance of the view of the trade unions and the Labour party that North sea safety should be brought together in one agency and should be the responsibility of the Health and Safety Executive.

Finally, I ask the Secretary of State once again today to take this opportunity to call together all operators, contractors and representatives of those who daily work and risk their lives in the North sea to make a fresh start to reverse all the sackings and blacklistings. Instead, they should work together to create a new safe regime in the North sea. That need for a fresh start is backed up by Lord Cullen's recognition of the benefits that trade union involvement can bring to safety. In future safety must be an integral part of all decision making, design, construction and operation. It cannot be an optional extra to be tacked on at the end.

I agree with the Secretary of State that the only proper tribute to those who died or suffered as a result of the Piper Alpha disaster is to do all that is humanly possible to ensure that such a disaster does not happen again. Some of the responsibility for that lies with the House.

Mr. Wakeham: I of course share the hon. Gentleman's concern over safety. We must get matters right for the future. As I said in my statement, the primary responsibility for safety has always been and will always remain with the operator. As the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, Lord Cullen observed that there were significant flaws in the way in which safety was managed by Occidental. The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to learn that I have sent the report to the Lord Advocate as that was the proper thing to do. At this stage, however, it would be wrong for me to say anything further about the events, which are now a matter for the Lord Advocate and not for me.

The hon. Gentleman is also right about the permits for work. My Department's technical investigation identified possible failings in the generation of Occidental's permit to work system as an element in the disaster. That system had broken down in the earlier accident for which Occidental was prosecuted and fined following an investigation by my Department.

I should perhaps say something about the situation in 1980 and 1990. In 1980, the Government accepted the majority view of the Burgoyne committee, which was set up by the previous Labour Government. It said that, on balance, it believed that the best case for safety in the North sea was to leave the matter with the Department of Energy. In 1990 Lord Cullen has recommended that, on balance—again it is a question of balance—the best case would be for transferring responsibility to the Health and Safety Commission. We have accepted the recommendation of the majority committee in both cases.

Since 1980, of course, the situation has changed. There have been a lot of developments in the North sea, the industry has become more complex and the HSC has also developed. That is why we believe that Lord Cullen was right to recommend the transfer to the HSC and why we accepted that recommendation. Lord Cullen also stated that he has not reached his conclusion on the question of independence, as was sometimes suggested. He reports that there was no evidence that the Department put production before safety.

Safety is the top priority. The number of inspectors has doubled to 60 since 1980. We have more than 120 officials engaged on safety matters. There have been difficulties in recruiting such staff and we have faced stiff competition for their special skills. We are actively seeking staff, we have put up their rates of pay by 23 per cent. and we are recruiting more. We also have the equivalent of 450 man years per annum working for the certifying authorities.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the trade union position. Lord Cullen recommended that 40 per cent. of the legal costs of the trade union group at the inquiry should be met from public funds, and I am certainly happy to accept that. I and my colleagues in the Department of Energy are happy to talk about the report's details with the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues with specialist knowledge and concern, and with the trade unions that have taken an interest in the matter. Together, we must all find a better way forward and Lord Cullen shows us how that can be done. We have an opportunity to go forward from a bad past to the future.

Mr. Alick Buchanan-Smith (Kincardine and Deeside): Having families in my constituency who lost loved ones in that terrible disaster, may I say to my right hon. Friend how much we are grateful to him for using this opportunity to remember those whose lives are permanently scarred by it? I also thank my right hon. Friend for remembering those who played such a remarkable part in the rescue operation following that disaster. I join my right hon. Friend in paying tribute to the skill and thoroughness of Lord Cullen and his assessors. Anyone who watched that inquiry at any stage must be immensely impressed by the way in which it was carried out. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend is to accept all the recommendations.

I welcome the new approach to safety that makes safety much more a matter of general management policy—proactive rather than reactive—which should be welcomed by everyone. I also welcome the intention to put safety under the Health and Safety Executive. It is important that the safety regulatory organisation should be independent and should be seen to be independent. That is what matters and I hope that that is ultimately achieved. I pay tribute to those who work in the safety directorate. Having spent time working with them, I pay tribute to their integrity and independence of mind in dealing with safety matters. I hope that we do not forget that.

In order to make the new regulatory safety organisation effective, would not it be sensible, as it is to be a discrete division within the Health and Safety Executive, for it to be sited in Aberdeen, where oil industry activity takes place? If that were done, better interplay and interface between the new safety organisation and those who are responsible, offshore, for carrying out safety measures, would be more likely.

Mr. Wakeham: Let me start with the last point. I realise the strength of feeling that the operation should take place in Aberdeen, but I think that my right hon. Friend will

agree that the staff of the new organisation should look at that and make a decision when they have their feet under the table, and they will obviously do that.

My right hon. Friend, who has a great knowledge of such matters and had responsibility for them in the past, is right that Lord Cullen's central point is that the new system is designed to concentrate on the auditing of the operators' management systems. Lord Cullen did not question the effectiveness of the inspection system in its own terms but looked at it more fundamentally. My right hon. Friend has got the point absolutely right.

Mr. Stanley Orme (Salford, East): I welcome what the Secretary of State said about the role of trade unions and the part that they can play in safety offshore. That is in contrast to the negative approach shown by the employers over a number of years, which I hope will now end.

When the Health and Safety Executive body is in place, will the regulations that apply now onshore—with all the back-up responsible for the health and safety of onshore workers—apply offshore? That is crucial for the future.

Mr. Wakeham: No, the tripartite approach will certainly stay, but the regime will have to be a different regime, and that will be the subject of discussion. As I said, I am perfectly happy to hold discussions with all those, of good will, wherever they come from—including the trade unions—on North sea safety. Lord Cullen rejects the simplistic equation of union recognition and safety, and endorses the Government's approach. Safety committee regulations give all workers a voice, and provide new rights to raise safety issues and to call inspectors, and arrangements for the hotline telephone number are included. Lord Cullen rightly says that the Government are correct to say that these matters should be reviewed after two years: they will be.

Sir Trevor Skeet (Bedfordshire, North): While the primary responsibility for safety lies with the operator, will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that this was a unique case and that, generally speaking, the response to the 1980 report was rather reasonable? Does he agree that there is no reason to believe that, under the proposals, which I fully endorse, the response will not be excellent?

One matter worries me. Two or three Ministries are still involved in this. Could not all the regulations, including those under the Department of Transport and other Departments, be focused on one directorate?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is correct to say that this great disaster was not symptomatic of a badly run industry. Lord Cullen's recommendations are based on existing best practice in the industry. We need to make sure that the best practice is followed by all the companies concerned.

We have met my hon. Friend's concern about one Department in practice, except that responsibility for maritime matters will remain with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): I certainly wish to be associated with the tributes paid by the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) to those who died, to the relatives, to those who still suffer, to the emergency services—and to Lord Cullen for the effort that he has put into this report. I also echo the Secretary of State's comment that the measure of our sympathy will be our determination that this should never happen again. But many people will ask why it ever happened in the first place and why it needs a disaster of these proportions to bring about the sort of review that has been carried out in this and in transport cases. Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that the measures proposed here will be sufficiently buttressed to stop us backsliding in future and returning to complacency?

I welcome the steps that the right hon. Gentleman has taken so far to implement the recommendations of the transfer to the Health and Safety Executive. What time scale does he have in mind for existing installations to bring forward their safety cases as urgently as practicable?

Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the involvement of individual employees in safety is the key; that they must be allowed to feel that they have a contribution to make in safety matters without fear of intimidation; and that this, perhaps more than any other day, is an opportunity for a fresh start in industrial relations offshore?

Mr. Wakeham: Absolutely—I agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point. Safety is, of course, a matter for the operator, but it is also a matter for every single person working in the North sea, and one of the necessary steps that must be taken is to draw more and more attention to that. Lord Cullen has produced a way forward that is as good as anyone can propose. It is an excellent report and it will be a landmark in these matters.

It is difficult in a short time to absorb and assess a very lengthy report. The central point of the report is where Lord Cullen says that, although my Department placed great emphasis on inspections and made great efforts to maintain a comprehensive and effective inspection programme, the form of those inspections concentrated too much on hardware and not enough on management systems. That is why, bearing in mind that the primary responsibility lies with the employer and must continue to do so, Lord Cullen recommends a change in the form of regulation to a system that is designed to concentrate on the operator's management systems. I think that Lord Cullen sees it very much in the same way as the hon. Gentleman.

Dr. Michael Clark (Rochford): May I also extend my sympathy to all those who were injured in mind or body in this terrible incident and offer my condolences to all those who lost relatives in the Piper Alpha disaster?

Does my right hon. Friend welcome, as I do, the recommendation in the Cullen report to change the emphasis from arbitrary checking of safety procedures to a planned audit to prevent accidents and incidents by looking carefully at safety planning? Does he agree, as I think many hon. Members agree, that the best way to use the highly skilled staff that are necessary to implement this new auditing procedure is to concentrate them in one organisation—the Health and Safety Executive—so that we can get the best use of those skills?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend has understood it very well. The basis of Lord Cullen is that he says that a safety case will have to be made out for any operator. That safety case will have to show that the company has its own systems for auditing its safety arrangements. It will be the regulator's task to check that that audit system is working. That, in as few words as possible, is the new system.

Mr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East): Is the Secretary of State aware that there is widespread anger in Scotland at the campaign currently being mounted by oil companies against trade union representation offshore? Is it not clear that a health and safety representative who has the backing and support of an independent trade union is likely to be more effective than a non-union safety representative? That is why many people believe that the Government's regulations last year providing for non-union safety representatives were a green light for the oil companies' campaign. Will the Secretary of State look again at this issue and consider whether the best approach is to extend the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 to enable offshore oil workers to have statutory rights similar to those of onshore oil workers with respect to trade union safety representatives?

Mr. Wakeham: I understand how strongly the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends feel about this issue. However, it is not a view that is shared by Cullen in his report. Cullen believes, as the Government believe, and endorses our view, that every employee working offshore has a right to be represented on the safety committee. Whether or not he is a member of a union, he still has that right, and we are determined to persevere with that.

Mr. Bill Walker (Tayside, North): My right hon. Friend will realise that my constituents who work offshore will be delighted at the Government's positive and quick response to this very important report. I should like to be associated with the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith), and will not repeat them.

Does the Secretary of State agree that every manager and every other person working offshore in the North sea will read the Cullen report and the lessons in it and will insist that those lessons be incorporated in the cases that are brought forward by individual operators? We should not forget that the North sea was developed largely by the private sector, which we should stop lambasting.

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Safety requires everyone who works on the North sea to participate. Operators have their prime responsibility, but they also have a responsibility to ensure that their employees are fully involved in safety matters.

Mr. Peter Hardy (Wentworth): May I illustrate the scale of the tragedy by referring to the case of one of my constituents? He was a young man of enormous promise who was the joy and pride of his family. He had only just graduated, was just completing his first period in offshore employment and was about to return home for his 21st birthday. No doubt other massive personal tragedies were involved in the accident.

Will the Secretary of State give an absolute assurance to those who still mourn that the safety audit will be carried out, that it will be effective and that it will be adequately resourced? Does he accept that too much parsimony in public expenditure can often lead to loss of life?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman has made his point graphically by giving instances from his own constituency. He is right: we all owe it to those who are continuing to work on the North sea to bring the new regulations and arrangements into play as soon as possible. I confirm what I said in my statement: no shortage of resources will slow down their introduction.

Mr. Michael Colvin (Romsey and Waterside): Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge that the current inquiry was based primarily on a study of fixed production platforms, and that those platforms are fundamentally different from mobile offshore drilling units that are, for most of the time, completely out of contact with hydrocarbons? Can my right hon. Friend bear that difference in mind when deciding how to implement the Cullen recommendations? Has he had any discussions with the British Rig Owners Association about it?

Mr. Wakeham: That illustrates another important point about the Cullen report. Cullen has not set out specifically and in detail the arrangements in every case; he has said that the operator of a platform or drilling installation must make his own safety case to satisfy the regulators. That does not mean that all cases must be identical; as my hon. Friend pointed out; they must be appropriate to the circumstances, and subject to review and auditing once established.

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): May I join those who have expressed condolences with the bereaved, and also with the families and survivors who have been scarred in body and mind? The repeated speculation on television over the weekend—with repeated footage of Piper Alpha being engulfed in a fireball—was as tasteless as it was insensitive.

Is the Secretary of State aware that the Cullen report is a damning and devastating indictment of both Occidental and the Department of Energy, whose efforts to apply a safety regime have been described as ineffectual and superficial? We welcome his assurance today that their responsibility will be transferred to the Health and Safety Executive.

Will the Secretary of State re-read the report, in which Lord Cullen states clearly that he accepts that the appointment of trade union safety representatives could be very effective because of the credibility and backing that trade union membership could give? Will the right hon. Gentleman give a further assurance that, although the responsibility may be technically removed from him, he will use his place in the Cabinet to be absolutely certain that a new regime will not lack credibility and backing, and that all the money to provide the inspectors will be made available? Does he accept that—as Cullen says—we must have prescribed regulations for safety in the North sea?

Mr. Wakeham: As I said in my answer to the hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), I will not comment on the position of the company or what is revealed about it in the report. I shall, however, challenge the hon. Gentleman on his comments about the effectiveness of my Department's inspectors, who do not deserve the criticisms that he sought to heap upon them. Lord Cullen did not question the effectiveness of the inspection in its own terms; he examined it more fundamentally, saying that the system that had been adopted for a number of years was probably not the right system and proposing a new one. He made it quite clear that it would be unfair to blame the inspector involved, who had done a competent job within the existing framework. The proposal is to change the framework, and that is right, which is why we have speedily accepted that recommendation.

Mr. Charles Wardle (Bexhill and Battle): My right hon. Friend should be congratulated on following Lord Cullen's advice and includng the regulator's duties within the scope of the Health and Safety Executive. However, will he clarify one point? Will the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 be amended? If my right hon. Friend cannot yet determine what the necessary financial provisions might be, can he at least say approximately how many personnel will work for the regulator when that important function is operating properly?

Mr. Wakeham: I am sorry to disappoicent my hon. Friend, but I cannot go further than what I said in my statement. I have written to the HSE today and I want to hold discussions with it. It will have an important say about whether it is satisfied with the arrangements to be made. Some of the necessary changes arising from the report can be achieved by administrative action, some by changes in the regulation, and some need primary legislation. However, I emphasise that nothing will be delayed for longer than I can possible help. I intend to proceed as fast as possible.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): The Secretary of State says with sincerity and, I am sure, genuine human feeling that these terrible events must never be repeated. Will he bear that in mind and bring his influence to bear before anybody talks about military options in relation to other oil wells?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is a bit wide of the statement.

Mr. Dalyell: What would the right hon. Gentleman say to a constituent whose Member of Parliament had played a part in the Burgoyne committee report and initiated an Adjournment debate on that, as I did, and who wanted to know why the recommendations of that report were not implemented? For once, it was not the fault of the House of Commons. Some of us raised the issue time and time again, and there was a debate on the report on 6 November 1980, as the *Hansard* of the time shows. Why were not the recommendations implemented?

Mr. Wakeham: I have tried to explain that I believe that it is perfectly consistent for the Government to have taken the view of the majority report of the Burgoyne committee in 1980—which said that, on balance, the best way forward was for the work to be undertaken by the Department of Energy—and to take a different view in 1990 following Lord Cullen's report, and wish to implement his recommendation that the balance of advantage—it is not a clear-cut, no-argument case—was that the work should be transferred to the HSE.

The hon. Gentleman is perfectly entitled to ask what has changed between 1980 and 1990; it is a fair question. Two things have changed. First, the industry is much more complex, and secondly, the HSE is in a much better position to deal with these matters than it was in 1980. That is why I believe that Lord Cullen is right.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am always reluctant to curtail questions when a tragedy of this magnitude has occurred. However, there is important business to follow. I hope to call all hon. Members who have been rising, but I ask them not to enlarge their questions beyond the statement and also not to ask questions that have already been asked and answered.

Mr. Michael Stern (Bristol, North-West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the report makes it clear that, whatever happens, responsibility for safety on the platform lies squarely with the employer? Does he further agree that that responsibility cannot possibly be met unless the employer or the operator has the full co-operation of every person on the rig at the time? Is it not true, therefore, that safety is damaged by strikes, by sit-ins and by the rantings and posturings of the media? Are those not to be deplored?

Mr. Wakeham: I take my hon. Friend's point. Strikes and industrial disputes are bad for several reasons, not least safety. It is in our best interests to avoid them.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): May I, on behalf of the Scottish National party, join in the welcome for the removal of the safety inspectorate from the Department of Energy and support the call for the new inspectorate to be located in the north-east of Scotland? Does the Secretary of State agree that the move to the independent inspectorate is not only important in itself but that it should signal the start of a new era in oil development in the North sea, when safety rather than production is king?

Will the right hon. Gentleman explain why he did not highlight in his statement the important passages from the Cullen report on the role of trade unions on safety committees, which highlight the benefit of trade union representation—their ability to resist pressure? Did not Lord Cullen recognise that the fear of victimisation stops proper safety reporting in the North sea? Why does not the Secretary of State acknowledge that? Does not he realise that whatever regime is in place in the North sea will depend on human resources and good industrial relations? There will not be good industrial relations in the North sea until the legitimate grievances of offshore workers are met by the Secretary of State responsible.

Mr. Wakeham: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's remarks are supported by the Cullen report. To equate union recognition and safety is a simplistic approach. Our safety committee's regulations give all workers a voice and provide new rights to raise safety issues and call inspectors. That is why we wish to continue with our original arrangements, which are supported by Lord Cullen and are subject to review when they have been in operation for two years.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Will my right hon. Friend accept it from me, as one who had responsibility at the Department of Employment for health and safety at work, that his approach and the Cullen approach of building in safety rather than trying to bolt it on afterwards must be the right way of pinning responsibility day by day, week by week, on operators? Many of us hope this will apply to sub-contractors, on both design and supply of personnel. Will he ensure that, at some stage, there is a review of all the split responsibilities of the various Departments with which the Health and Safety Commission and the Health and Safety Executived link? Will he try to ensure, in his offer of talks with unions and representatives of the Opposition, that the argument about trade union recognition does not become the most important thing, which is the elimination of risk?

Mr. Wakeham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I can give him the undertaking that he seeks: there will be a

[Mr. Wakeham]

review of all the overlapping matters to ensure that they are limited, and there will be a review of the role of the certifying authorities, as Lord Cullen recommended, after the new regime is in place.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): I draw the Minister's attention to paragraph 21.84, which welcomes trade union involvement in health and safety on offshore oil rigs. Will the Minister condemn the practice of oil companies that are operating a blackmail list—a blacking list of workers who have fought for health and safety at work on the offshore rigs? They are being denied their rights and opportunity honourably to earn a living by the offshore oil companies. Does the Minister realise that in my constituency people lost their lives and that people who are fighting for safety to be uppermost at their place of work are being denied the right to work? Will he condemn the practice of oil companies blacklisting honest and decent men?

Mr. Wakeham: If the hon. Gentleman has a blacklist, he had better send it for me to have a look at. We have seen no evidence of this blacklist, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary tells me that most of the people who were on strike are back at work in the North sea.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Does not the Secretary of State realise that his reply to the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) about the siting of the new unit in Aberdeen was totally inadequate? By the time those people have their feet under the desks, the position of the desks will have been decided. Why cannot he make the decision today? What are the arguments against having the unit sited in Aberdeen? Surely a decision should and could be made by the Government as quickly as possible.

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman comes out in his true colours from time to time. He is clearly a doctrinaire man. If I had announced that I was deciding what to do without consulting any of the employees concerned, he would have been up in arms. As I said, this is a matter for the Health and Safety Executive to consider in the light of its new responsibilities. That is a perfectly reasonable point of view.

Mr. Ron Leighton (Newham, North-East): Does the Secretary of State accept that there will be no confidence in the arrangements offshore in the North sea while the operators carry out an anti-trade union policy and have blacklists, and while many people are intimidated because of their trade union actions? The right hon. Gentleman said that he is willing to meet the trade unions, and that is welcome, but the operators are not. Will the right hon. Gentleman use his influence so that the operators make a new start by taking the more enlightened view that he takes? Will he look——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Briefly, please.

Mr. Leighton: Will the right hon. Gentleman look at the arrangements in the Norwegian sector of the North sea, which are much more civilised—where, for example, health and safety representatives have the power to stop a job if they think that there is a danger? They do not do that very often, because they do not need to do so. Will the right hon. Gentleman perhaps recommend some of those arrangements to the operators?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Gentleman, who knows a lot about these matters, talks about being civilised. I have said that I am prepared to talk to trade union leaders about the Cullen report and other matters relating to the North sea. Union recognition is a matter for the parties involved to decide between themselves. The question that is relevant to today's discussion is safety and Lord Cullen was clear—union recognition and safety matters are separate issues; one is not connected with the other. Indeed, Lord Cullen endorses the Government's approach, which is to allow all people who work in the North sea to have a say in safety matters. Our safety committee regulations give all workers a voice and provide new rights to raise safety issues and to call inspectors if workers are in any way disatisfied. We are content with those arrangements, and they have been endorsed by Lord Cullen.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am afraid that I shall not be able to call all the hon. Members who have been standing. I shall call two more Back Benchers and then the Opposition Front-Bench speaker. We must then move on to the debate on the Queen's Speech.

Ms. Marjorie Mowlam (Redcar): Will the Minister clarify two points that he made this afternoon? The first concerns safety in the work force. He told us at the beginning that everyone should participate in safety matters, and in answer to another question told us that he was against strikes. Many of the people who went on strike were my constituents. After Piper Alpha, they wanted their union to represent them on health and safety issues. That is all they wanted, and that right has been denied to them.

Will the Minister also clarify——

Mr. Speaker: Order. No—one question, please.

Ms. Mowlam: Oh, go on. My question will be very short.

The Minister referred several times to the safety audit. Will he tell the House how that safety audit will operate, so that we will know that the operators are obeying its recommendations? Chapter 12 of the report refers to an audit recommendation that the diesel fire pumps should not be on manual mode during diving. There was already an audit recommendation to that effect, so how do we know that the safety audit will work?

Mr. Wakeham: The hon. Lady may be right in saying that some of her constituents went on strike because of their view about safety arrangements. All I can say to them is that their view was not endorsed by Lord Cullen, and I have accepted his report. The hon. Lady wants certain safeguards. The safety case which will have to be presented by any operator in the North sea will have to include an arrangement for the operators to audit their management of safety. The task of the regulator under these new arrangements is to see that that happens. If the Health and Safety Executive needs new powers, it is entitled to talk to me about that. I have accepted what Lord Cullen said about these matters in their entirety.

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): I am sure that anyone who analyses the Minister's remarks and

subsequently reads the report will conclude that the comments about the operators and owners of the rigs are most damning.

One aspect of safety has not been mentioned this afternoon. It concerns hours of work. Some of the men who work the rigs are working 12 hours on, 12 hours off, plus overtime. Some of our rig workers work no fewer than 2,300 hours a year, plus overtime, whereas workers in the Norwegian fields work 1,600 hours. The Minister must apply his mind to the question and recognise that, with men working such long hours, the rigs must be in great danger.

Mr. Wakeham: I am not sure whether there is evidence to support what the hon. Gentleman says, although I recognise his concern about something that is a right and proper matter for inclusion in any arrangements. In the arrangements for the proper management of safety on rigs, it will have to be made clear that people should not work such long hours that they cannot concentrate on the job in hand: I entirely agree with that.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, South): May I join hon. Members in expressing my appreciation to Lord Cullen for the magnificent job that he has done in cutting through the evidence and presenting a report which I think will mark a watershed in safety in the North sea? As a Scottish lawyer myself, I think that one of the advantages of having a Scottish lawyer do the job is that it helps to cut through some of the prejudices.

For the benefit of the Secretary of State, who appears to be somewhat dyslexic in his reading of certain aspects of the report, let me quote paragraph 21.84, which contains Lord Cullen's views on the trade union position:

"I am prepared to accept that the appointment of offshore safety representatives by trade unions could be of some benefit in making the work of safety representatives and safety committees effective, mainly through the credibility and resistance to pressures which trade union backing would provide."

That seems to me unequivocal.

It is inappropriate that the Secretary of State should pursue his prejudice, and his party's prejudice, against trade unions and about the benefits that they have clearly brought to the safety regime onshore. I still do not understand why that prejudice remains, especially as it prevents the Secretary of State from recognising the clearly expressed view of Lord Cullen that the safety systems and the involvement of the trade unions should be pursued offshore.

I have two questions for the Secretary of State. The first concerns legislation. It is clear—as the Secretary of State has admitted—that primary legislation will be required. The right hon. Gentleman had the report some three weeks before the Queen's Speech, although that speech contained no reference to possible legislation. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, if primary legislation is necessary, it will be introduced expeditiously—if possible during this Parliament and before the election?

Another question that needs to be asked, although not ncecessarily by me—I know that it is being asked by my constituents, by the survivors of the Piper Alpha tragedy and by the relatives of the victims—concerns responsibility. It is clear that the Secretary of State is being evasive in his interpretation of what Lord Cullen said. It was not only the oil company—Occidental—that was responsible. The company obviously had some responsibility but it operated according to the latitude allowed by the Department.

The question of the right hon. Gentleman's officials is dealt with emphatically by Lord Cullen in his report, but Lord Cullen is the first to point out that those officials were under-resourced and that they were operating in difficult circumstances and without strong political direction or support. It is clear that it was the Government who ignored the recommendations of the Burgoyne committee and who consistently under-resourced the inspectorate and tried to apply the principles of the free market to safety. They failed to recognise that, while the oil industry risks only its capital, oil workers risk their lives and therefore need the protection of a strong safety system.

The Government have consistently abdicated their responsibility. Will the Secretary of State today tell the survivors and relatives where the guilty party is and who will carry the can for the tragedy?

Mr. Wakeham: First, I share the hon. Gentleman's praise for Lord Cullen's skill. I am happy to associate the hon. Gentleman, who is a Scottish lawyer, with Lord Cullen. If Lord Cullen is a good example of a Scottish lawyer, then Scottish lawyers are good lawyers. The hon. Gentleman was right to praise Lord Cullen.

With regard to trade union recognition, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, I suggest that he and any other hon. Member who feels strongly about it should read the whole of the report before they reach a firm conclusion. In particular, they should read chapter 21.85 in which Lord Cullen states:

"I consider that it would be inappropriate for me to recommend any change in the method by which safety representatives are chosen."

Just as the hon. Gentleman can pick examples to make his point, so I can pick examples to make mine. We owe it to Lord Cullen and to those who work in the North sea to study this comprehensive report before we reach premature conclusions which may be of a partisan nature.

I have said that I have sent the report to the Lord Advocate, who must consider it in the light of his responsibilities. However, I have made it abundantly clear that I accept that the work of the officials in my Department was carried out with the best intentions and with the best skill and expedition.

Chapter 15.50 is one of the most significant parts of the report. Lord Cullen states there:

"Even if the shortcomings"——

that is, some of the shortcomings that were recognised in some of the officials—

"which I have mentioned above were made good would inspections be able by their nature to achieve the objective of assessing the adequacy of the installation as a whole?"

The answer to that forms the basis of the report—to recommend a completely new system for regulation.

Mr. Dobson: That was recommended in 1980.

Mr. Wakeham: I have answered the question about 1980 and 1990 on several occasions. There were many fundamental differences between 1980 and 1990. In 1980, the Government accepted the majority report of the Burgoyne committee. In 1990, we have accepted Lord Cullen's report. That is right and proper in both cases.

BILL PRESENTED

CARAVANS (STANDARD COMMUNITY CHARGE AND RATING)

Mr. Secretary Patten, supported by Mr. Secretary Rifkind, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Norman Lamont, Mr. Michael Portillo and Mr. Robert Key, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to the liability to standard community charges and non-domestic rates in respect of certain caravans and their pitches: And the same was read the First time: and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 10.]

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[FOURTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [7 November].

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign, We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Younger.]*

Question again proposed.

Mr. Speaker: Before I propose the Question again, I draw the attention of the House to the fact that a large number of right hon. and hon. Members wish to participate in today's debate. Therefore, I propose to place a 10-minute limit on speches between 6 pm and 8 pm. I ask those hon. Members who are called before or after then to bear that general limit in mind, please.

Rights, Freedoms and Responsibilities

4.38 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Waddington): The title of today's debate—"Rights, Freedoms and Responsibilities"—is identical to that chosen by the Opposition last year. I was surprised then, and I am even more surprised today, that the Opposition should have thought it right to choose such a title. Words such as "rights, freedoms and responsibilities" form part of the language of liberty and have no place at all in the vocabulary of socialism. The Conservative party believes in and understands the meaning of freedom. Our vision is of a free society in which intrusions on individual liberty are minimised and take place only under the rule of law.

If the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) and the Labour party have finally abandoned socialism and embraced freedom, I am perfectly prepared to accept their conversion. But I am blessed if I can see why I or anybody else should vote for a lot of Johnny-come-latelies with the inspiring slogan: "We do earnestly repent of our sins and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings. The remembrance of them is grievous unto us. The burden of them is intolerable." The idea of Neil kneeling is somewhat unconvincing.

The Labour party may not be proud now of its commitment to socialism, but I understand that the commitment still exists, and it is hardly qualified therefore to talk about freedom. It is entirely disqualified from claiming an interest in responsibility.

All hon. Members have a responsibility to uphold the rule of law—I should have thought that all hon. Members would agree with that. If any hon. Member does not believe that, and does not believe in a parliamentary democracy the only way to change a law is through Parliament, he or she should not be here today. Responsible citizens pay their taxes and responsible Members of Parliament should pay their dues to their local authorities. They certainly should not add to the burdens of their fellow men and women by refusing to pay. Yet

Opposition Members—more than 20 of them now, I am told—have at one time or another publicly stated that they would not pay their community charge. I do not know whether they have now done so, or whether they are still imposing on their neighbours the cost of the services which they receive, but, even if those hon. Members have seen sense, the damage has been done.

The message has gone out that Labour Members of Parliament are prepared deliberately to ignore the laws of this land. What does that sort of behaviour contribute towards the "rights, freedoms and responsibilities" that we are debating today? What does the Labour party's failure to take action against the law-breakers on its own Benches say about the true extent of its commitment to "rights, freedoms, and responsibilities"?

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): In the past 10 years how many times have the courts found the Government guilty of breaking their own laws? How many times have they been taken to the European Court and found guilty?

Mr. Waddington: Decisions taken by Ministers in good faith and on legal advice as to the effect of legislation passed by this Parliament are one thing. Deliberate defiance of the law—that is what we are talking about now—is an entirely different matter.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Are not matters somewhat different if the franchise has been fiddled and if a measure such as the poll tax is introduced and knocks people off the electoral register? In those circumstances, logic no longer applies. When I make my speech I shall explain the situation, why I have not yet paid, and why it is in defence of parliamentary democracy that I have not paid. We require to get rid of that pernicious piece of legislation which picks at parliamentary democracy.

Mr. Waddington: I will be very interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's speech in due course. I shall be very interested to hear whether the hon. Gentleman's attitude is condoned by the right hon. and hon. Gentlemen on his Front Bench. The hon. Gentleman is saying that, despite a law that has been passed by a democratically elected Parliament, he is entitled to elect not to obey that law. What is worse, more mischievous and more disgraceful is that he then heaps the burden of the cost of the local services that he receives on to his neighbours.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): I am most grateful to the Home Secretary for giving way, particularly as he is upbraiding the official Opposition. On public figures breaking the law, would he care to comment on allegations that were widely made this weekend that the Prime Minister knew of British Satellite Broadcasting's breaking of the Broadcasting Act 1990 and did not even report it to the responsible Minister, never mind to the law-enforcement authorities?

Mr. Waddington: That is a most extraordinary question which has been framed by the hon. Gentleman *[Interruption.]* Just a minute. I shall refer to broadcasting in a short time, and I am confident that we shall have a bit of knockabout fun then, judging by the way in which that question was framed, but it is very much better that I should keep to the theme of my speech and refer to broadcasting when it is appropriate to do so.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Waddington: Only if the hon. Gentleman's intervention will not touch on broadcasting. *[Interruption.]* I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman on broadcasting when I refer to it, but not now.

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Will the Home Secretary give way on the poll tax?

Mr. Waddington: Yes.

Mr. Evans: The Home Secretary has been busily condemning Labour Members of Parliament for not paying the poll tax. I assure him that I have paid my poll tax and have urged everyone to pay their poll tax. Does the Home Secretary agree that any system that provides the London borough of Westminster with twice the resources to look after children who are deemed to be at risk than it gives the metropolitan borough of St. Helens can only be described as absolute corruption?

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman has apparently well rehearsed that question, which he put to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment last week. The hon. Gentleman knows the answer perfectly well. I certainly do not propose to waste the time of the House giving it again today.

We should not be surprised by Labour's attitude. We all remember the Labour Members who supported the pickets against the police at Orgreave and at Wapping. We all remember that every single Labour Member voted against our proposals to give trade unions back to their members, that every single Labour Member voted against our proposals to outlaw secondary picketing, and that every single Labour Member voted against the proposal to give people the right not to join a trade union. Labour might talk about rights and freedoms but it never, never, never votes for them.

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): On the subject of rights and responsibilities, is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that many of the law-abiding majority who have paid thier community charge greatly resent the threat that they might have to pay more next year because local authorities have failed to collect the charge from a law-breaking minority? Will my right hon. and learned Friend pass on to his colleagues in the Cabinet the need for the capping mechanism to take account of the fact that, perhaps spending should be cut to meet the failure to raise revenue?

Mr. Waddington: I shall certainly pass on to my right hon. and hon. Friends what my hon. Friend says, but his point is well taken. The real gravamen of the charge is that, while pretending that they are making a grand political gesture, people are just heaping burdens on their neighbours. I do not see anything commendable in that.

If Labour pays only scant regard to rights, freedoms and responsibilities, for those who sit on these Benches it is the very essence of our belief, and our belief is evidenced by our acts.

Mr. Thomas Graham (Renfrew, West and Inverclyde): Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Waddington: As long as it is not on broadcasting. I shall refer to that matter in a few minutes.

Mr. Graham: On poll tax capping, rate-capping, and so on, the way the Home Secretary is carrying on today, next he will be suggesting a bit of knee-capping.

Mr. Waddington: I find that question somewhat difficult to follow. I think that it was meant to be in jest, and I shall take it so.

I was saying that our belief in rights, freedoms and responsibilities is evidenced by our acts. We have given the right to be balloted before industrial action and to be balloted for the election of trade union leaders.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): As the Home Secretary is so keen on ballots, will he answer this question: is he in favour of a ballot for the leadership of the Tory party next week?

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman seems unaware that any hon. Member who wishes to stand for the leadership of the Conservative party may do so every year.

We have stopped people being compelled to join trade unions against their will. We have given council tenants the right to own their own homes. We have given parents more choice about the school that their children attend and more say about the way in which that school is run.

Last year, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) accused me of not having "the faintest idea" of what freedom means. I know what it does not mean. It does not mean the creation of a socialist economy, with less and less choice and a downward spiral of living standards. It does not mean the sort of penal tax rates which Labour previously imposed and now promises to impose again. It does not mean the virtual confiscation of property such as the shares held by the millions of individual shareholders in British Telecom and in the water industry. In short, freedom does not mean socialism.

Last year, the Home Office brought forward several Bills, perhaps the most important of which was the Broadcasting Bill. The Broadcasting Act 1990, now on the statute book, offers a dramatic extension of choice for the viewer and listener. It provides for a tremendous expansion in radio, with three new national radio stations and many new local and community stations. It also makes provision for a new terrestrial television channel, with a far more open and publicly understandable process for the granting of franchises for Channel 3. It provides for a new framework for satellite and cable television services. It will, I am sure, come to be seen as one of the most important reforms of broadcasting in the past 40 years.

On satellite television, the Independent Broadcasting Authority will, of course, have to make a judgment about the future of the DBS franchise, but non-domestic satellite broadcasting is clearly going to offer more choice to the viewer. If the Labour party's view is that restrictions should be placed on the company prepared to take the risk of developing this sort of competition, and if it wishes to see this increased choice for the viewer snuffed out, it will only be running true to form. Labour has always opposed greater choice in television. It voted against the creation of ITV. It has always been against freedom of choice.

Mr. Grocott: When the Prime Minister was told about the proposed restriction of choice in relation to satellite channels and Mr. Murdoch's proposed monopoly, did she inform the Home Secretary, the Minister responsible, that that was about to take place?

Mr. Waddington: The hon. Gentleman seems unaware that the possibility of such a merger has been knocked around in the trade press for months and months. I have an edition of "Broadcast" with me. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the edition for 9 November, he will see that its very first page reproduces what was on the front page of a previous edition a year ago—

Mr. Tony Banks (Newham, North-West) *rose*——

Mr. Waddington: Just a minute. I have not finished answering the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Grocott).

During the meeting with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, Mr. Murdoch mentioned the possibility of a merger, but only in the most general terms. Such a possibility had already been floated in the trade press in the way in which I have already mentioned. What has happened is now a matter for the IBA and the Office of Fair Trading. It was not a matter for the Government a fortnight ago; it is not a matter for the Government now. It certainly was no business of the Prime Minister to go telephoning around the place to all and sundry, me included, saying that she had been told by Mr. Murdoch what everybody already knew.

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): Since, in the Home Secretary's words, the idea of a merger has been "knocked around" for some time, he will have had an opportunity to consider its implications. He will know that the chief executive-designate of the Independent Television Commission believes that the BSB franchise was not its to dispose of and that it was not legally entitled to pass it to Mr. Murdoch. Therefore, although Mr. Murdoch is operating that franchise, he is operating unlawfully. Bearing in mind the Home Secretary's strictures on obedience to the law, what advice can he give Mr. Murdoch about his unlawful conduct?

Mr. Waddington: It is not a question of advice to Mr. Murdoch; it is a question of what power the IBA has in this situation. The right hon. Gentleman is entirely right. It may be that the contract between BSB and the IBA has been infringed, in which case it is possible for the IBA to terminate the contract. However, the right hon. Gentleman also knows what could be the consequence of that for those who are able to watch on squarials at present. If it is the new company's intention eventually to broadcast on Astra alone, there would not be much advantage in the termination of the contract tomorrow rather than in a few months' time.

Mr. Hattersley: I assure the Home Secretary that I am perfectly prepared to tell my friends that they should obey the law and pay the poll tax, so why does not he have the same respect for the law and tell the Prime Minister's friend, Mr. Murdoch, that he should obey the law, too?

Mr. Waddington: I am not sure that that question is even worthy of an answer. What took place between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and Mr. Murdoch is certainly none of my business, but my understanding is exactly as I expressed it to the House a short time ago —that the possibility of a merger was mentioned only in the most general terms. Such a possibility had already been floated in all the papers—certainly in the trade press—for months and months.

Mr. Tony Banks: Although I do not believe everything that I read in the newspapers, I should be interested to know whether the Home Secretary saw the front page of *The Independent on Sunday*, according to which a representative of Mr. Murdoch has said:

"'The Prime Minister took notes and treated the matter confidentially.'"

Did the Prime Minister treat the matter so confidentially that she did not think that it was worth speaking about it to the Secretary of State for the Home Department, who has direct responsibility for such matters? Was the Prime Minister keeping the right hon. and learned Gentleman in ignorance because, since he is so unimportant in her eyes, there did not seem to be much point in her telling him anything?

Mr. Waddington: This is absolute rubbish. My officials were told about the merger on the Friday afternoon—in advance of the public announcement. What transpired between Mr. Murdoch and the Prime Minister is exactly as I have stated it.

But this debate is about the Queen's Speech and the Home Office programme for the coming Session, and before I move to the bigger Bill, the Criminal Justice Bill, I should say a word or two about the War Crimes Bill.

As you heard in the Gracious Speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker, we intend to bring the Bill back to the House in due course. I think that it would be odd if we were not to do so in view of the very clear support that the Bill received here not so very long ago. However, what is far more important is that those of us who voted for the Bill the last time round are convinced that it is right.

I do not accept the argument that a decision was taken after the war not to pursue war criminals. It is true that a decision was taken to stop trials in the British zone of Germany, but at that time nobody addressed his mind to the possibility of people having arrived and settled here in Britain immediately after the war who were guilty of the horrific crimes set out in the Hetherington—Chalmers report. Because no one knew that any of them were here, no one could have made a judgment to allow them to evade the consequences of their crimes. I am convinced that there is a world of difference between making a criminal offence of an act which was not unlawful at the time of its commission, and giving the courts power to try people who, if the allegations against them are correct, perpetrated acts which they must have known at the time were crimes according to the law of every civilised nation.

But the House will wish to consider whether adjustments can be made to meet some of the concerns expressed in another place while preserving the fundamentals of the Bill, and I am sure that that is something which will be well debated when the Bill is brought back to the House.

I now come to the Criminal Justice Bill. With extraordinary cheek, the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook has from time to time suggested that the Government's proposals foreshadowed in the White Paper represent a belated conversion to ideas which he has nursed close to his heart for years and years. My wife tells me that he became so carried away the other day that he referred to 25 years. I do not know about his heart, but he certainly kept the ideas close to his chest. Of course, the previous Labour Government did absolutely nothing to forward the policies to which he now seems to give a warm welcome.

This is not the Second Reading debate, but there are several aspects of the Bill which I should like to highlight.

First, the Bill sets out a coherent statutory framework for sentencing based on the seriousness of the offence. This is a just approach and, together with the work on the Judicial Studies Board, the power in the hands of the Court of Appeal to set sentencing guidelines and the power in the hands of the Attorney-General to refer over-lenient sentences to the Court of Appeal, it should make for much greater consistency in sentencing.

Secondly, the Bill extends the range of community penalties available to the courts and enjoins the court not to pass a custodial sentence unless, having considered all the opportunities for punishment in the community, it concludes that only a custodial sentence is justified. In effect it extends over the whole age range the requirements placed on the courts in respect of young offenders in the Criminal Justice Acts 1982 and 1988 which, incidentally, have contributed to a large decline in the number of young people sent to prison. Sending people to prison is an expensive pastime and all too often it is likely to result in people coming out of prison worse than they were when they went in. Community penalties, however, can make tough demands on the offender—we intend that they should—yet allow him to continue to maintain his family and make reparation to those who have suffered at his hands.

Thirdly, the Bill sets out to reform the parole system so that those sent to prison will be subject to a more rational and predictable system, and the sentences that they serve will be more closely related to the sentences passed on them.

Mr. Anthony Beaumont-Dark (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Most of us agree that it is much better that those who commit crimes of violence and might commit them again should be kept in prison. However, the perpetrators of some of the worst crimes in the City have not been kept in prison. I do not believe that crimes of fraud in the City are victimless. A crime is a crime. Is not it true that wealthy people who have lived a life of great luxury fear going to prison much more than they do a great fine? If we say that we shall fine people £1 million, £2 million, £3 million or £4 million, we might even encourage crime. The one thing that people who live good lives do not like is the idea of being in the slammer. In the end, the possibility of being put in the slammer helps to stop those who could commit those crimes from doing so.

Mr. Waddington: There is nothing in the framework set out in the Bill to lead anyone to suppose that serious cases of fraud will not result in imprisonment. I do not suggest that for one moment. But my hon. Friend is right to touch on the changes in the fining system which will give the courts greater flexibility. There may be cases where people who are not fined today will be fined in future. However, that was not the point that my hon. Friend was making.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I am enormously encouraged by the spelling out of the intention to extend the use of community penalties. My right hon. and learned Friend will know that study after study has shown that the best chance of reclaiming particularly young criminals is to give them the opportunity to do voluntary or semi-voluntary service of one sort or another for the less fortunate. On many occasions in the past, good programmes were run for three years as an experiment but

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

then came to an end. That seems an awfully expensive and extravagent way of doing things. May we hope for greater continuity of those excellent projects in the future?

Mr. Waddington: I shall bear in mind what my hon. Friend said. There will be many opportunities for developing all sorts of new programmes for punishment in the community. I certainly want the voluntary sector to play a much greater role than now. Perhaps my hon. Friend will come to see me with his ideas. He will have a receptive ear.

Fourthly, a system of unit fines will be introduced. That was touched on in the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Mr. Beaumont-Dark) a moment ago. Less well-off offenders will pay less than the better-off, so the fines will make similar demands on each. The system will help courts to set fines at realistic levels and that together with the power to attach income support, should ensure that more fines are paid and fewer people finish up in prison for fine default. People should not be sent to gaol if they can't pay only if they won't.

Together with the Maintenance Enforcement Bill, which will enable the courts to make an attachment of earnings order when a maintenance order is first imposed, the Criminal Justice Bill forms part of the Government's strategy to strengthen the family and reinforce parental responsibility. The Bill will ensure that parents have to be present when their children are before a court. The courts will also be given power to bind over parents to exercise proper control over their children. In addition, where parents are ordered to pay their children's fines, the amount of the fines will be related to the means of the parents.

Many hon. Members on both sides of the House will have been delighted to see the proposals contained in the Bill which relate to the Pigot committee's proposals. The Bill will make it easier for children in abuse cases to give evidence, for example by allowing a video-recorded statement to be admissible, while ensuring that the rights of defendants are properly safeguarded.

Finally, the Bill allows for the private sector to tender for police and prison escort duties and the operation of remand centres.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett: What does the Home Office intend to do about the difficult case of life sentence prisoners who are out on licence and have their licences revoked? I ask that question in the light of the recent case which went to the European Court of Human Rights. Will there be judicial review of that process?

Mr. Waddington: One must examine separately discretionary and mandatory life sentences. I shall reply first with regard to discretionary sentences, with which the European Court of Human Rights dealt the other day. We have only just received the judgment. I am studying it carefully and, of course, I shall come to the House as soon as possible to tell it our conclusions.

I cannot predict what precise effect our proposals in the Criminal Justice Bill will have on the prison population. Although its overall effect will be beneficial in that regard, it certainly would not be right to present our proposals as being designed to get rid of prison overcrowding. It would be easy to do so, but wrong. It is not my job to keep out of prison those who, in the public interest, should be there. Therefore, we have been right to get on with the prison building programme. The recent encouraging fall in the prison population—down by more than 4,500 compared with two years ago and by more than 3,000 compared with a year ago—has enabled us this year, and will enable us in 1991-92, to spend more money on refurbishment, particularly on the programme to end slopping out.

In the preparation of the Criminal Justice Bill we have not discovered all the causes of crime or identified all the ways to prevent it. We shall undoubtedly be presented with numerous glib analyses today. I fear that Labour's first response to rising crime is almost always to blame society or the Government or both, but rarely the criminal.

Labour Members used to say that the number of reported offences had increased because we had created what they chose to call a "loadsamoney economy". It was an insulting way of putting the point and almost as though people should not have the cars, televisions and video recorders which, as often as not, are the targets of thieves. Nevertheless, there was more than a grain of truth in what they said. There is, indeed, much more property about to steal than there was 10 or 20 years ago. The recent disappointing figures showed that, with much of the increase due to theft of or from cars.

Now, Labour Members sing a different tune. The right hon. Member for Sparkbrook recently told the annual general meeting of Crime Concern that he was convinced by the argument that

"a decline in our sense of community coupled with a renewed growth in unemployment"

goes some distance to explaining why crime is increasing. Not that is to my mind a particularly insulting diagnosis to those people who suffer misfortune in their lives and put up with hard times, yet never dream of turning to crime.

Clearly, there is much about which the Opposition will never agree, but there are many things about which we can all agree, and the first is that the fight against crime needs the active support of us all. The Government, the police and the community are all in it together. The Government's principal role is to encourage an awareness in the community of what people can do to help themselves, to further crime prevention schemes, such as the safer cities programme, and to see that the police are properly resourced. I have been impressed by the co-operation between local authorities, the police and local residents in the operation of the safer cities programme. I am delighted by the positive attitude of local authorities, playing a part in all the projects, and I pay tribute to them.

No one can question this Government's support for the police. Between May 1979 and May 1990, the total number of police officers in England and Wales increased by 15,096. In 1990, 1,100 uniformed police officers were added to the 126,000-strong establishment. Provision was also made for some 1,200 more civilians, so releasing more policemen from desk jobs for operational duties. However, there is no point in providing new officers unless they have the equipment they need to do the job. I was pleased to announce last week that we are increasing our support for police capital expenditure by nearly £60 million in the next year. On top of that, I was also able to announce a further increase of 700 uniformed officers and 1,300 more civilians.

I have mentioned the Home Office Bills in the Queen's Speech, but there are other matters that I want to bring before the House when time allows. I have already

announced that I intend to take the first opportunity to create a new offence of prison mutiny to deal with the kind of events that we saw at Strangeways. I can confirm today that we intend to introduce legislation to cover the proposals contained in Lord Justice Taylor's report into the Hillsborough stadium disaster. He recommended the creation of four new criminal offences to deal with disorderly behaviour at football grounds.

The Government have considered his proposals and concluded that they would provide valuable new measures to help control hooliganism at football grounds. The sale of tickets on the day of the match without the authority of the home club, throwing missiles, chanting obscene or racist abuse, and running on to the pitch without reasonable excuse would become offences. We believe that it is right that in the context of football those activities should be unlawful because of their implications for order. We shall bring proposals before the House as soon as parliamentary time allows.

In a speech the other day the right hon. Gentleman offered to make "common cause" in the fight against crime, but I doubt Labour's commitment in that regard. Last week the right hon. Gentleman reaffirmed that he wants to put the police forces of this country into the hands of those local authorities whose mischievous antics have brought such shame on his party.

Far more important was his promise to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act. How on earth can he reconcile that promise with the rights, freedoms and responsibilities which we are debating today? What of the rights of those killed and maimed by the IRA? Will others who are threatened be better protected by the right hon. Gentleman's commitment? Would the freedom of all of those faced with the evil menace of the IRA be more secure if one of our weapons against the terrorists was scrapped? What sense of responsibility does the Labour party have when it talks of scrapping a power which a Labour Government introduced, and the value of which the Labour party recognised year after year until a different breed of Labour Member came into this place in 1979? The right hon. Gentleman knows that he should have had the courage to stand up against them.

We will be carrying on the fight. We will remain firm to the principles which have guided us over the years. We will certainly continue to see that the rights and freedoms of the British people are protected and enhanced, and that a proper balance is struck between freedom on the one hand and responsibility on the other.

5.17 pm

Mr. Roy Hattersley (Birmingham, Sparkbrook): The Home Secretary was kind enough to remind the House that the topic for today's debate chosen by the Opposition was identical to that which we chose a year ago. My opening comments are identical to those of a year ago. By his speech he demonstrates that he is neither psychologically nor intellectually equipped for his office. I do not propose to play his game. Instead, I shall talk about the real issues facing this country and the concerns covered by the topic that we have chosen for debate.

I offer my unqualified support for one sentence in the Gracious Speech:

"My Government will vigorously pursue their policies in fighting crime."

I hope that the Government will have more success with those policies than they have had in the past 10 years. September crime figures were the worst recorded in our history. They showed an increase of 70 per cent. since the 1979 general election. That is a humiliating record for a Government who were elected on the specific promise to strengthen law and restore order. The Government's failure to curb and control crime is another reason why they are unfit to hold office.

On Thursday, the Home Secretary told the country that spending on law and order had increased by 70 per cent. since the Government were elected in 1979. If that is the case, the taxpayers are entitled to complain that they have had nothing like value for their money.

Of course, nobody claims that the Government are directly responsible for the whole increase in crime, but there is no doubt that they have escalated that increase. At one end of the crime spectrum the "get rich quick" mentality, so much the theme of the Thatcher years, has fostered a contempt for the law typified by the Guinness trial.

It has also been typified by the Home Secretary's refusal to condemn the unlawful behaviour of his friends at Sky. At the other extreme is the argument that I made some days ago, and shall continue to make, about the increase in crime as result of unemployment and poverty. When I made that point, I was quoting from a Home Office working document. The Home Secretary is perfectly entitled to refute it if he wishes to do so, but to condemn me for quoting it is a new view of ministerial responsibility.

Mr. Waddington: What is the right hon. Gentleman quoting from?

Mr. Hattersley: I am quoting from the same document that I quoted from six months ago when the Minister of State—no longer in his place—then intervened to say, "That one doesn't count. It was written by the man with the earring". No doubt the Home Secretary will be able to find the man with the earring whom his Minister identified. He will then obtain the working document, which I have in my possession and which I shall gladly send him, which says that unemployment and the fear of unemployment contribute to the increase in crime.

My principle charge today is not that Government policy causes crime, but that the Government have done far too little to contain the epidemic. Instead, they have tried to blame everyone else, for example, victims who they say do not take sufficient care of their property—the Home Secretary said that again today—and chief constables who are said to be deficient in their duties and should be the subject of performance assessments. Everyone is to blame except the Government.

For a decade, a fundamental error has prejudiced Government policy. The emphasis has always been on solving crime and creating a deterrent to crime by imposing severe sentences on those who are caught and convicted, but that strategy contains two fatal flaws. Only one crime in four is ever solved, so criminals do not go around with the constant fear of detection and punishment. Perhaps more important, by expending so much time on headline-catching promises about tough sentences, attention and energy has been diverted from the much more important subject of crime prevention.

The Home Secretary persists in saying that the Government took the lead on crime prevention long before anyone in the Opposition thought about it. I must warn him that I propose to retaliate with force next week

[Mr. Hattersley]

with the worst punishment at my disposal—I shall quote from my speeches of 10 or 15 years ago. I know that the Home Secretary regards that as the ultimate deterrent and I propose to use it against him if he persists in saying that he, and only he, has thought about crime prevention. The Home Secretary is in the reverse position—he must take part of the blame for the emphasis on punishment as distinct from the emphasis on prevention. He must know from the evidence that capital punishment will not cut the murder rate. He parades his support for it to ingratiate himself with the diehards in his party, but in doing so he prejudices the whole crime debate.

Prevention is far more important than capture and conviction as the stiffest sentences never compensate for the material loss and psychological trauma of a burglary or a mugging. However, throughout almost the lifetime of the Government, crime prevention has been relegated to the second order of importance. That is exactly the point made by Lord Justice Tumin, Her Majesty's Chief inspector of prisons, in an article entitled "Prevention better than Punishment", which appeared in *The Times* on Tuesday. His message was that

"jail should be reserved for the most serious criminals"

and that prison regimes should not be judged according to whether they are "nice or nasty" but according to the effect that they have in preventing those who inhabit them from committing further offences. For some men, young men in particular, prison ingrains their criminal tendencies. The reform of prisons is an essential part of the war on crime.

In my view—I detect that somewhere buried under what the Home Secretary said today it is his view as well—the war against crime should be based on a partnership between the police, people and local authorities. It is the Government's duty to reinforce and encourage that partnership, yet they have allowed the police to become dangerously overstretched—more overstretched than at any time in recent history. Local authorities have been positively discouraged from playing a proper part in crime prevention, but people have been expected, privately and individually, to carry more of the responsibility for crime prevention than they can successfully discharge.

I gladly pay tribute to neighbourhood watch, crime concern and the public's involvement in the safer cities project—limited geographically and in terms of funds though that initiative may be. Such schemes are to be encouraged and should be developed, but unless they are matched by more direct action they can make only a marginal contribution to crime prevention. I propose to describe how a better contribution should be made and I shall take first the police.

The Home Secretary says that no one can doubt the Government's commitment to the police, but the police doubt it. I am astonished that he has not learnt that during a year in which his relations with the police have sunk lower than those between any Home Secretary and the police for a long time. I make my position absolutely clear—there is no doubt that we need substantial increases in police manpower, effective manpower. We should not have increases on paper, but real increases in police houurs devoted to real police duties.

Establishments have been increased in the past 10 years—usually, each increase has been announced several times to give the impression that it is greater than it is. However, often the new recruits have been financed by reductions in overtime, which have reduced the net increase that the new establishments provided. More important and more damaging is the fact that police officers continue to perform tasks that should be discharged by civilians. More important and more damaging still is the fact that because the police have had heaped upon them new and often inappropriate burdens, their resources do not match the crisis that we expect them to face and overcome.

Last week the chief constable of Durham described to me the problems that his force faces in conducting a prolonged murder investigation. Dozens of detectives have taken hundreds of statements, recorded under the provisions of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984. Those detectives are then obliged to type up their interviews when they should be pursuing their inquiries as detectives and not acting as copy typists. They are required to undertake the long process of one-finger typing because the authority cannot afford to employ audio-typists. That is the direct result of pressure on local authority spending created by the poll tax and the revenue support grant. It makes nonsense of the claim that the Government are providing all the resources necessary to allow the police to do an effective job.

The Government have certainly increased the obligations on the police and some of them, PACE for example, are undoubtedly necessary and should be applauded. Nevertheless, they are time-consuming. Some of the new burdens are not so much unnecessary as positively undesirable. Police time should not be spent pursuing overseas visitors who have overstayed the time specified on their visas; nor, to echo the words of the chief constable of South Yorkshire, should police officers be used as a debt collecting agency for poll tax defaulters. The performance of such a task drives a wedge between the police and the community whom they serve. Such tasks are also a scandalous waste of police time.

The police want to get on with their business of real policing, freed, as they said to me at the Police Federation's annual conference at Scarborough this year, from the impertinent claim that they are the property of this Tory Government. For the police to discharge their duties effectively, they must be convinced that society values their service, but the Government behave in a way that seems to be positively intended to undermine police morale.

The Government vetoed the arbitration judgment, which increased housing allowance, and in doing so broke their promise always to implement the Edmund Davies award. The Government threaten the essential confidentiality of the central police computer by turning it into an independent agency. They are risking the efficiency of the forensic science service by requiring it to sell off its goods and wares to police forces as if it were a private contractor.

The Government insist that tasks that are the proper resonsibility of the police should be performed by untrained employees of private security companies. Instead of all those issues, the Gracious Speech should have contained the diametrically opposed provision—a proposal for the licensing and regulation of the private security industry.

Mr. Rowe: I am pleased that the right hon. Gentleman intends to be absolutely clear in his speech. May we then expect a Labour document defining precisly those activities deemed to be wholly appropriate to the police and those deemed not to be? He has already complained

bitterly that police are involved in pursuing people who will not pay the poll tax or keep the law, but also that several other functions have been taken away from the police.

Mr. Hattersley: I do not want to be absolute about that, because a chief constable has obligations and responsibilities. As the Home Secretary will be the first to say to his hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), it is not for politicians to tell chief constables what or what not a police officer should do. The hon. Gentleman may, but I do not, want politicians to have tactical control over police forces. However, I want the House to stop imposing specific, undesirable burdens on the police force. The poll tax provision that I described, and the pursuit of overstayers—visitors who have extended their visa limits—are not a matter of general definitions, but duties and burdens imposed by the House, which should stop doing so and instead act in the interests of good policing.

The third element of the essential coalition is local government. The best councils want to work enthusiastically with the police. Two weeks ago I was in Keighley, where the local authority recently completed a pilot scheme that tested the sort of practical, perhaps prosaic policy of better locks and lighting, and more facilities for the young unemployed, which was once sneered at as an element of crime prevention. As a result of such improvements and interest in crime prevention that the scheme generated, crime in the district had fallen, year on year, by 81 per cent. The scheme was a success, but the council was unable to extend it to other districts that would benefit because the money was simply not available.

The small sums allocated by central Government to local government for crime prevention—for example, in the city of Birmingham, £250,000 was allocated for the safer cities project—in no way compensate for the £20 billion loss of rate support grant that councils have had to endure throughout England and Wales in the past 10 years. As a result, hard-pressed local authorities without any specific crime prevention obligations naturally concentrate their efforts and spending on other sectors. The Gracious Speech should have included the promise to impose a statutory duty on all local authorities to introduce crime prevention measures. That duty should have contained the obligation to include crime prevention in local authority development plans and planning

I repeat that reform of the penal system is an essential part of the war against crime. The Criminal Justice Bill is based on that principle. Although our detailed debate on those proposals will take place in a week or two, I propose to say something about the Bill in a moment, as the Home Secretary has done. Before I do so I shall deal with other aspects of the Gracious Speech, both inclusions and omissions.

First, at a time when there is an increasing public determination to end racial discrimination in this country, the Gracious Speech said not a word about the disadvantages suffered by black and Asian British, or ways of ending them. The Police Federation commits itself to eliminating any sign of racial discrimination in its ranks. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis urges greater efforts to stamp out racial attacks. The Army promises to take action to ensure equal opportunities. But the Home Secretary is wholly silent on the subject. I know that racial equality is not a subject that enthuses him, but it enthuses the Opposition. We propose to take action to eliminate racial discrimination after our victory in the general election.

Mr. Waddington: The right hon. Gentleman should be careful about what the says. I was at Bramshill the other day to show my support and take part in a seminar organised by the police on some of the very matters that the right hon. Gentleman raised. If events are taking place in the police force of which he approves, I cannot see how he can say that the Home Office is doing nothing. We have been fully involved in those initiatives and are proud of that. We are paying a great deal of attention to such matters and I am doing my level best to promote all such initiatives and am proud to do so.

Mr. Hattersley: I am glad that the Home Secretary intervened, and he can do so again immediately after my next paragraph, which deals directly with the question: what should the Home Office be doing that it has not done, and does not do? The Home Secretary knows that, while the Criminal Justice Bill was being drafted in the Home Office, officials—I am assured that they were senior officials—approved clauses to impose a duty on courts to end all racial discrimination in the criminal justice system. Those clauses included the provision of ethnic monitoring of sentences. We know that ethnic minorities are more likely to be sent to prison than their white contemporaries, and stay there for longer.

Those clauses were drafted in the Home Office, but none of them appears in the Bill. Would the Home Secretary like to intervene again to say why not?

Mr. Waddington: For what it is worth, at no time since I came into the Home Office have I ever seen any such draft clauses or anything remotely like them. If the right hon. Gentleman's imagination is running away with him, he must be responsible for it. We can certainly debate whether it would be desirable to spell out in black and white on the face of the Bill that there should be no discrimination throughout the criminal justice system, but the right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that if we were to do so, we should merely be restating what is the law now.

Mr. Hattersley: I hope that the Home Secretary is not telling me that no clauses exist in draft form in the Home Office.

Mr. Waddington: I have not seen them.

Mr. Hattersley: The Home Secretary says that he has not seen them, but that may be a confession of his incompetence. Is he telling me that they do not exist? If he is not, we can pursue the matter on Second Reading.

Mr. Waddington: What was the last question?

Mr. Hattersley: Do such clauses exist? Does the Home Office have them ready if the Home Secretary approves them?

Mr. Waddington: They clearly exist in the right hon. Gentleman's imagination, but I have never heard of them or seen them.

Mr. Hattersley: May I urge the Home Secretary to inquire into the matter when he returns to his Department tonight or tomorrow? That is the first issue that does not appear in the Gracious Speech.

[Mr. Hattersley]

Another issue to which no reference is made, even though the Home Secretary was kind enough to refer to in in his opening passage, is broadcasting, even though we are promised, and anticipate, secondary legislation this Session in the form of orders to regulate the operation of satellite broadcasting. I have several questions to ask the Home Secretary and it is clear from what he said at the beginning of his speech that not only does he not know the answers, but he does not know the crucial questions in this matter.

I do not expect the Home Secretary to intervene straight away. All I ask is that he notes the questions, does his best to understand them and obtains answers, not necessarily by the winding-up speech tonight, but by tomorrow or the end of this week. I could not be more reasonable in my request. All we ask for is answers to the questions, which are crucial and which up to now the Home Secretary does not appear to have appreciated.

The questions have achieved a new importance because of the de facto merger between British Satellite Broadcasting and Sky and the conversation on the subject between the Prime Minister and Mr.Rupert Murdoch. I know that the Prime Minister's meeting with Mr. Murdoch was kept from the Home Secretary and he did not know about it until newspapers told his office. However, I assume, putting aside the usual contempt of the Prime Minister for her Ministers, that the Home Secretary has now found out what went on.

It is silly, and an insult to the intelligence of the House, to say that Mr. Murdoch merely mentioned the matter to the Prime Minister and it was not regarded as being in any way important. Mr. Andrew Knight, chief executive of Mr. Murdoch's empire in this country, said that Mr. Murdoch has only two or three meetings a year with the Prime Minister and that he began with some casual conversation on the subject of BSB and Sky. That sort of explanation is wholly incredible, and in the light of it I want to ask the Home Secretary some specific questions.

First, I wish to give the right hon. and learned Gentleman another chance to answer a question that he has already refused to answer. Does he share the view of the chief executive of the new Independent Television Commission, that BSB is not entitled to pass on its contract to Sky, and that Sky transmissions are now being broadcast through BSB dishes unlawfully?

Mr. Waddington: That is certainly my understanding. I think that there was a clear breach of contract, but as I pointed out earlier and as the right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, that is a matter for the IBA; and the IBA, as a consequence, is perfectly entitled to terminate the contract that it made with BSB. I thought that I had made that abundantly plain.

Mr. Hattersley: That leads us to the next question. Can the right hon. and learned Gentleman give us advice as to whether the Prime Minister understood that this was an unlawful operation when she discussed it with Mr. Murdoch? I suspect that, as usual, the Prime Minister, believing herself to be omnipotent, thought that she understood what she was talking about and gave Mr. Murdoch to believe that he had tacit support for his wilful disregard of the provisions in the Broadcasting Act which was passed a few months ago.

How does the Home Secretary propose to ensure proper respect for and compliance with the Act that he sponsored last year? Does he believe, for instance, that, after the merger is complete, the DBS satellite—the old BSB satellite—must be kept in use, or is he content with satellite broadcasting in this country developing merely around Rupert Murdoch's inferior Astra technology?

My second question is directly related to the Home Secretary's specific legislative duties during the rest of this year. What regulations does he anticipate will govern the conduct of the new merged authority? Originally, it was thought that the quality requirements imposed on channel 3 and channel 5 broadcasters would not be necessary because satellites were competing with each other. Now there are no competing satellites. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman believe that quality obligations must be introduced through secondary legislation?

Thirdly, what is the Government's position on the ownership of newspapers by satellite broadcasters? We were told last year that secondary legislation would be introduced to place a limit on BSB newspaper holdings. We were also told that, for a variety of reasons—I shall not go into them—this would not apply to Sky. Will the limitations on newspaper ownership apply to the new merged Sky and BSB company?

In short, what do the Government believe should happen now? Are we to have secondary legislation limiting cross-ownership—the sort of idea that was going to apply to BSB before Mr. Murdoch took it over—or, now that Mr. Murdoch is involved, is the new company to be given the preferential treatment which he was previously going to enjoy with Sky? The crucial question is: is Mr. Rupert Murdoch to be given special treatment again as he was when he acquired the *Sunday Times*, *The Times* and *Today* and as he was when Sky was absolved of the obligation placed on BSB?

In the past, the Government have done Mr. Murdoch favours as a mark of their gratitude for the way in which he has helped them to win general elections. Now that, with or without his help, they are going to lose the election, is there any hope that they might behave with a little integrity?

Mr. Waddington: The right hon. Gentleman is very free with his insults, but he must not make snide allegations of dishonesty against individuals unless he is prepared to make them outside the House. He knows perfectly well what I said before about what was discussed at the meeting. Even if Mr. Murdoch had said in plain terms that he was about to sign an agreement with BSB, that would not have been a statement that he was going to behave unlawfully, because what appears to be unlawful, or contrary to the contract signed between BSB and the IBA, is the fact that no warning was given to the IBA and that it would seem that there might be a controlling interest by a non-EC body in the new outfit.

As none of this was discussed at No. 10, it has no bearing on the right hon. Gentleman's allegation—so now let us come to the specific question—[HON. MEMBERS: "Briefly."] I will not allow the right hon. Gentleman to make snide, nasty remarks imputing dishonesty without coming back at him, and he had better get used to that.

We intend to put a 20 per cent. ownership limit on newspaper interests in DBS. That is what we always said we would do. We always said that there would be no

similar limitations on the newspaper interests in pure satellite broadcasting, for two reasons. First, the practical reason——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Surely some of this could be left to be rebutted in winding up.

Mr. Waddington: With respect, I was asked a specific question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Even the Home Secretary does not have the right to make a second speech.

Mr. Waddington: With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, it would not be customary to ask leave of the House to speak again, so I have but one opportunity to reply to the questions put to me by the right hon. Gentleman. If the right hon. Gentleman does not want me to reply——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has the right to intervene if the right hon. Gentleman who has the Floor gives way—but intervention should be brief.

Mr. Waddington: I shall try to be brief——

Mr. Hattersley: I told the Minister that I would be happy to receive his answers on a future occasion, but I do not want to quarrel with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I shall let the Home Secretary do that. I shall accept whatever ruling you make.

Mr. Waddington: We made it plain that we would conduct matters in this way, first, for reasons of practicality, because the satellite company can uplink from abroad. Secondly, we recognise a world of difference between the Government imposing restrictions on ownership of scarce frequencies allocated by Government, and imposing restrictions on satellite broadcasting in which there is scope for diversity of different channels. As for the right hon. Gentleman's last point——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have an obligation to preserve the rights of other right hon. and hon. Members who want to take part in the debate. I very much hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will bring his intervention to a conclusion.

Mr. Waddington: I can swiftly deal with the last point. I cannot say whether the contract for DBS will be re-let if the contract with BSB is terminated. It will be a pity if there is no contract for DBS, but that is outside the Government's control and it is quite likely a matter for the market.

Mr. Hattersley: What I find extraordinary about that intervention is that the Home Secretary had it all ready to read out but did not feel it right to read it out during his speech. He could have encapsulated the principle in a single sentence. When BSB was independent, newspaper ownership rules were to be imposed upon it. Now that it is associated with Mr. Murdoch, those rules are not to apply. The country, like the House, will regard that as a disgrace.

I want to make our position on this subject plain. Immediately after the Labour Government are elected, we shall ask the Monopolies and Mergers Commission to examine the concentration of media ownership in this country—newspapers as well as television and radio. We shall ask the MMC to make specific recommendations on how the present unacceptable degree of concentration of ownership can be split up.

Another topic omitted from the Gracious Speech and connected with newspapers was the Calcutt report. Will the Home Secretary confirm—I am reluctant to ask a question lest he should answer—that it is still his intention to implement the Calcutt proposals for statutory regulation if the newspapers do not accept the Calcutt last-chance offer to put their own house in order?

When the Calcutt report was published, the Home Secretary was admirably firm on this matter, and he had my wholehearted support. Cynics outside said that the firmness would disappear as the general election approached. I would be grateful if his Minister will confirm that it is still intended that Calcutt will be the last chance before statutory action. I know that the industry is setting up a commission to supervise self-regulation and that a code, not quite the Calcutt code but a code of sorts, is being drawn up. I want to be told explicitly that, if that code is broken, the statutory route will be followed.

That leads to my next question about Calcutt. Some of the Calcutt recommendations propose changes in the law that are not directly related to the code. I shall give the obvious example. It is recommended that taking a photograph of a person on private property without the explicit permission of that person should be an offence. I assumed that the Home Secretary was going ahead with that statutory element in Calcutt. I am glad to see him nodding. I would have been more reassured if I had found that proposal in the Gracious Speech.

The Taylor report is not mentioned in the Gracious Speech but apparently proposals about that will be brought before us this year. We shall examine the Home Secretary's proposals, some of which are right. Proposals about throwing missiles and about racial chants are right. We want to examine carefully the dangerous matter of running on to pitches without adequate reason. I am against people running on to pitches, but I am worried about the definition of "adequate reason", and we shall look carefully at the legislation's small print.

I should like to refer briefly—because that is all that the Home Secretary's remarks deserve—to his comments on the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989, before finally speaking to the main legislative item. He does himself, his Government and his cause no good by, for the narrowest and cheapest of political reasons, trying to suggest that there are some hon. Members who do not detest terrorism and wish to exterminate it in this country. I can think of nothing that would give the IRA more pleasure than to believe that what the Home Secretary says is true.

We have had what I knew would be the general statement on terrorism. I take this opportunity to reaffirm, because it is right to do so whatever the Home Secretary says, the general determination of the House to obliterate terrorism in the United Kingdom. In a free Parliament and a democracy, there are different views about how that can best be achieved, but no one should have any doubts—this is directed particularly to the IRA—about our united determination to achieve the basic objectives.

I shall make only one comment about disagreement on tactics. I do not propose to talk about the Government's practical record, lest that should give heart to our mutual enemies, but nothing has happened in the last 10 years to entitle the Government to dismiss out of hand the Labour

[Mr. Hattersley]

party's prescription for greater success. That prescription says that tough action against terrorism has to be matched with the determination to do nothing that alienates the law-abiding majority. That has always been our pragmatic objection to the Prevention of Terrorism Act, and it remains our objection.

We also have an objection in principle. The simple injustice of long periods of detention without charge or judicial examination during which there is no access to legal advice is a matter of principle that the Government should take seriously when they consider the consequences of the wrongful conviction of the Guildford Four, the Maguire family, and, as I think will soon be demonstrated, the Birmingham Six. The new Criminal Justice Bill could have been the opportunity to ensure that such injustices occur more rarely. I regret that such injustices will never be eliminated, but their incidence could have been reduced, and, the chance has been missed.

It gives me no pleasure to say that there has never been a time in modern history when the British people were less confident about their criminal justice system. Many, although not all, of their doubts are misplaced, but there is no doubt about how they came about. The doubts have been encouraged by judges who impose preposterous sentences accompanied by absurd opinions, by notorious miscarriages of justice, and by a whole variety of allegations—most of them unjustified—against the police. The police have reacted to allegations more rationally than the Government. The police see immense advantage to themselves in an independent system of investigation of police complaints. That is what the police want, and I promise that they will have it after the next general election.

The Government could have done much to quieten other fears by adding three radical but simple proposals to the Criminal Justice Bill. They could have improved the provision that a defendant cannot be convicted solely on uncorroborated confession evidence. They could and should have included additional safeguards to ensure that suspects are properly represented.

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): The right hon. Gentleman speaks about conviction on uncorroborated confession evidence, and I know that he takes the matter seriously. What would he say to a woman who has been raped and whose only evidence is what she says on oath actually happened? Some time later, the man can get rid of all the forensic evidence against him and what remains is the woman's word. Does the right hon. Gentleman propose to go into the next general election saying that the single woman complaining without corroboration can never bring to justice the man who raped her?

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. and learned Gentleman asks a politically hard question, and I shall give him the intellectually hard answer. First, I did not talk about the evidence of the victim against the man who had been charged. I talked about confession evidence, a confession by the man who has been charged and against whom there is no evidence apart from what he said when he was interviewed immediately after his arrest. The hon. and learned Gentleman asked a question which was different from the point that I was making, but I shall do my best to answer it, because I take the matter seriously.

The rules of evidence to protect the innocent in cases about which one feels deep sympathy have to be applied with equal rigour to cases of a different sort. We cannot say about cases for which we have such sympathy that the rules of evidence which are generally regarded as right and proper can somehow be forgotten. That is not an easy answer, and some people will criticise me for giving it in this particular. The serious point about evidence is that, by and large, the rules have to apply in all cases and the innocent have to be given the opportunity to protect their innocence.

The Criminal Justice Bill should include the creation of an independent review body to investigate suspected major miscarriages of justice. The Maguires, the Guildford Four and, I believe, the Birmingham Six demonstrate the need for that reform. I have no doubt that the inadequacies of the present appeals system are the result of the narrow legal confines within which judicial appeals are now bound and limited. Some cases need to be looked at again from start to finish without the prejudices—I use the word in its least pejorative sense—that result from a liftime spent in the legal professions.

Anyone who reads the appeal case of the Birmingham Six and others has the terrifying suspicion that, if what was said on their behalf had been said to a tribunal that was not exclusively made up of judges but had perhaps a majority of judges and some representative, intelligent, informed laymen, the examination would have been different and the outcome might well not have been the same. A new tribunal must be set up to examine cases of long detention. I repeat that it will include judges, but it will also include laymen who will examine the whole issue from a wider perspective.

The second great omission, apart from the absence of a proper civil rights dimension in the Rent Bill, is its failure to make any serious inroads into the scandal of remand prisoners. That scandal was highlighted in national newspapers by the case of Mr. Terry Marsh, who spent 10 months in prison before he was tried and acquitted. Respect for civil liberties requires us to reduce the number of remand prisoners and the time that they spend on remand. Our desire to reduce the prison population also stems from that respect. That chance has been missed.

I emphasise that my questions are rhetorical and ask the Home Secretary, why is the rule that all defendants must come to trial within 112 days of committal not immediately put into operation all over England and Wales? Why have London and the south-east—where the problem of delays in bringing prisoners to trial is most acute—been exempt from that rule? Why is there no proposal in the Bill for a tightening of the criteria in the Bail Act 1976?

The number of remand prisoners in gaol has doubled during the life of this Government. The legal provision —that bail is granted unless a strong case can be made against it—should be made more explicit, and the law should require that the principle be uniformly applied.

Perhaps most important of all, to reduce the time that is wasted in court, a court inspectorate should be established to report to the Lord Chancellor on the efficiency of the courts' conduct and operation. At present, the courts too often operate for the convenience of judges, barristers and solicitors. To free the courts and to get them moving, that sort of restrictive practice ought to be ended.

It would be ended by a genuinely radical Government, and it will be ended by a generally radical Government after the next general election.

That having been said, I repeat my unqualified support for the principle that underlies the Criminal Justice Bill. Of course a custodial sentence is very often the most appropriate sentence for crimes of violence and sexual offences. Sometimes, men and women have to be imprisoned to protect the community; the Home Secretary and I are at one about that. We are also in agreement that very many men and women now in prison should be serving their sentences in the community.

At least, I think we are in agreement. Sometimes, the Home Secretary agrees that prison corrupts rather than reforms. He described prisons in the *News of the World* —a dangerously radical journal by the Home Secretary's standards—as "universities of crime" and implied that the time had come to change both the syllabus and the minimum entrance requirement. However, on other occasions—launching the Bill was one of them—he takes, or appears to take, quite a different view. Unless he gives a clear and unequivocal lead, the Criminal Justice Bill will not reduce the prison population to the extent that is essential.

The Governor of Armley prison told me on Friday that his inability to build the proper relationship with prisoners —to prevent the tragedies that have occurred at that prison, and to have some hope of preventing prisoners from offending again—required him to have more resources: prison officers as well as new and better buildings. The right ratio of staff to prisoners will not be achieved simply by recruiting more officers; it will be achieved only by a substantial reduction in the prison population.

I very much welcome the emphasis of the public expenditure White Paper on improving old prisons—ending slopping out, for instance—rather than the slower process of building new ones. But the only way in which we can make prisons work—to cut crime—is to achieve a substantial reduction in the prison population.

I offer two other reasons for introducing more sentencing within the community. First, it is cheaper. It costs £20,000 a year to keep a man in prison which often achieves nothing at all. Secondly, alternative sentencing is more satisfying for the victim who has been mugged or burgled. Retribution may be sweet, but restitution is usually sweeter. On that principle, it is important that, wherever possible, alternative sentencing—sentencing within the community—should be related to the offender's making good the loss or damage.

I hope—although I am not sure, even from what the Home Secretary has said today—that that is common ground between us. Today I shall not deal in detail with any of the other areas of cross-party agreement—video recording admitted in evidence for child cruelty cases, or unit fines in magistrates courts. Nor shall I describe at length our opposition to the privatisation of court escort duty, the privatisation of remand and the fatuous proposal for electronic stagging, which merely fulfils the purpose of getting the other Minister of State on television during each summer recess. Now that he has had his moment of glory, that proposal should be buried as the inoperative and useless proposal that it is. More detailed comments must wait for the Second Reading debate on the Bill. I shall simply end by describing again my forebodings about the central purpose of the Bill's actually being implemented by the judges, unless additional steps are taken.

On the day when the Bill was published, Judge Derek Clarkson announced:

"The Court of Appeal is reducing sentences in a way that is derisory and derogates from the authority and dignity of Her Majesty's judges."

Does the Home Secretary think that anyone who takes dignity so seriously and talks of Court of Appeal decisions as derisory will voluntarily co-operate with his proposed reforms? Of course they will not—not until they are encouraged to do so by the policy of ensuring that the will of Parliament is expressed and implemented by a sentencing council which advises on sentencing.

That advice would be designed to achieve some uniformity in sentencing—between courts, the sexes and the ethnic groups. It would encourage the principles of sentencing—in this case, a reduction in committal to prison—that Parliament and Government wish to apply. I have no doubt that judges must be allowed discretion. I am not in favour of judges being told precisely what sentences they must apply to every conviction. However, if judges are to be given that discretion, a sentencing council to guide—not instruct—them is essential.

The House should not take my word for it. I quote from last Saturday's edition of *The Times*. Referring to the Bill, it said:

"Another provision ought to be added. The guidelines, though an improvement, still give the judges considerable discretion. Much depends on how the appeal court interprets them. All this is hazardous. The transmission mechanism between parliament, Home Office and judiciary is creaky and ineffective. Judges are notoriously their own creatures, disinclined through long exercise of power to heed outside influence. Penal reformers . . . have long advocated the creation of a sentencing council. Representing all interested parties, its job would be to formulate detailed guidance on sentencing for the courts. Justice demands no less."

I hope that in Committee, the House will demand exactly that.

I doubt whether the Government—for all their claims to reforming zeal—will summon up sufficient courage to take such a radical step. However, the next Labour Government will. Indeed, the message from this day of the Queen's Speech debate is absolutely clear: in some areas —combating crime in particular—the Government's policy has been a ghastly failure. In others—broadcasting, community relations and the reform of the judicial system —it has been grotesquely wrong. Even when they have accepted the right principles, such as the extension of non-custodial sentences, they have acted—and are acting —with pathetic timidity. The next Labour Government will right all those wrongs.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. I remind the House that, between now and 8 pm, speeches should not exceed 10 minutes.

6.8 pm

Mr. Tony Durant (Reading, West): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for inviting me to speak.

It is after a seven-year silence that I rise to address the House. I feel rather like a Trappist monk a phrase that has now been given currency by the Leader of the Opposition; I sometimes wish that he would enact it himself. I am not making a personal statement—I left of my own free will

[Mr. Tony Durant]

—so there will be no statement about why I left. The longest speech that I made in the seven years was to report on the Committee stage of a Bill that was taken on the Floor of the House. Perhaps the most popular speech that I used to make was "I beg to move, That this House do now adjourn." That is not to say that I am moving that motion now; let us be clear about that!

I have listened to a great many speeches in that period —good bad and indifferent. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has left the Chamber. When I had to do the march up with replies from Her Majesty, with what he called my billiard cue, I stood at the end of the Chamber, marched up and read out the message from Her Majesty. The first time I did it, he came up to me and put his Polo mint over the top of the "billiard cue". I said to the hon. Member for Bolsover, "Dennis, you have obviously done this before." He said, "Ah, but we have now got television."

Obviously he thought that it was worth doing again. The most frightening part of that job is not the coming up, but the going back. I must warn anyone who takes it on about that. That is when the rude remarks begin—"He needs a haircut," "His shoes are no good," and so on. However, I was given great confidence on my first occasion because a revered Conservative colleague, a squire of the realm, said, "Better than the last one." I was comforted by that remark.

The speech of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was long on analysis of crime but short on remedies. It was usual Labour party policy —more money, more intervention.

No separate debate has been provided to discuss the important subject of the environment. From what the Labour party has said time and again, I understood that the environment was a key subject. However, it has not chosen it for debate, so many of us are here today to make a speech on the environment in a debate that provides a rather loose framework.

The Gracious Speech contains some good proposals, and I am especially keen on the emphasis on parental responsibility. For many years, I have stated my belief that parents, together with their teenage children, should accept responsibility, for the crimes of their children. They should be jointly summonsed in court. If that were the case, the practice of Dad throwing the children out of the house because he wanted to watch television would die. He would not want again to suffer the agony of a court summons. Instead, he would say, "Where are you off to at this time of night?" It is a simple doctrine, but it would work.

The importance of the family is vastly underrated by both sides of the House, especially its importance for children aged one to five. That time span is a crucial part of their development. All parties are encouraging women to go out to work far too soon. We must consider fiscal measures that would encourage women to stay at home. Some of my hon. Friends would raise the issue of child benefit, which I accept is important, but the important new legislation for separate taxation of women provides new initiatives. We must deal with the problem, because we are creating a society of delinquents. There is no longer the necessary close contact between the mother and the child in the formative years——

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): What about the Dad?

Mr. Durant: Dad comes in later, but the mother is the most important figure during those years.

I am keen that the Government should consider family policy with that very much in mind. If they do not, there will be long-term problems.

I wish now to touch on the environment, even though this is not strictly an environment debate. In particular, I wish to deal with the construction industry, which in my part of the world has been hit very hard by the downturn in the economy. I declare an interest as a political adviser to a demolition contractor. The main problem is that there is a surplus of buildings and of completed new houses. It will be a long time before the industry can pick up the backlog and move forward. I ask my right hon. Friend the Chancellor seriously to consider another 1 per cent. reduction in the interest rate before Christmas. That would make a considerable difference. He should also remember that many young couples have mortgages based on an annual rate, which are due to be revised on 1 January. Many people will be badly affected.

Although the White Paper "This Common Inheritance" makes no mention of a Bill, I hope that one will be introduced. I welcome the fact that it deals with the maintenance of cathedrals, something for which I pressed many times when I was on the Back Benches. The Church has lacked a certain responsibility for such buildings, and if it is not prepared to do anything, the state should have the opportunity to intervene. Some of the buildings are in a bad state and need immediate help.

I very much welcome the establishment of the National Rivers Authority, and I am delighted that it is prosecuting every water authority in the country. The chairman is a former Secretary of State for Wales, with whom I worked, and he is a robust man. He is doing an excellent job in making the water authorities more conscious of water quality. Indeed, the Thames is improving rapidly.

The White Paper also refers to leaded petrol. I and the hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker) waged a campaign on that issue many years ago, when no one was interested. A professor in my constituency has been banging on about lead in petrol for many years. The hon. Member for Perry Barr and I had many Adjournment debates in the middle of the night on that issue. We must press harder to ensure that people use unleaded petrol.

I want to say a word about Europe. I know that this is not a Europe debate, but I feel that it is an appropriate subject. Britain is part of Europe, and it always has been. It is not a new phenomenon. We have not suddenly discovered Europe, not having known that it existed and therefore never having been there. Indeed, we have always quarrelled with Europe. Disraeli, when he was Lord Beaconsfield, attended the congress in Berlin in 1878 and had a major row with Bismarck. Disraeli threw down the gauntlet and said, "I want the matter settled." In a loud voice, he said to his personal assistant, "Go down to the station and get the train engine warmed up, because I am going home."

Arguments between Britain and Europe are not new; they have been going on for generations. The public are not that convinced about complete integration with Europe. They want independence, and they want to retain the British dimension. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister takes the right attitude.

There is a good programme for this Session. I hope that we are not diverted by leadership issues whipped up by the media. No one telephoned me over the weekend. I sat there, thinking that the media might think that I was a stalking horse, or that it might want to know whom I would support, but not a dicky bird. Of course, someone might have telephoned this morning, but no one telephoned on Saturday or Sunday.

I support the Bills proposed for this Session. There is not too heavy a load. It is a positive, radical approach and I am sure that, on that basis, the Conservative party will win the next election.

6.16 pm

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): I listened carefully to the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) when he referred to the burdens imposed upon the police. I agree with him in certain respects, but I wish to add to his list. I recently had a conversation with an officer of the Metropolitan police, who said that job satisfaction had been so badly damaged by the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 that many of his colleagues were tempted to look the other way when a crime was being committed because, more often than not, the policeman and not the offender attracted the complaints and the hassle. That must be rectified.

At yesterday's remembrance services, most of us thought of our late colleague Ian Gow. His memory is especially vivid in Ulster—a part of the kingdom that lay close to his heart, and for which he sacrified a promising ministerial career and, only a few months ago, his life. Five years ago, another supporter of another Government resigned over the same issue—Senator Mary Robinson. She and Ian Gow felt that they could not continue to support their respective Governments, who had reached an agreement that they knew, as we knew, would end in failure. Other Members of this House shared their view.

Many such hon. Members expressed their misgivings as they emerged from the Aye Lobby. They patted me on the arm and said, "James, you understand that we had to obey the Whips—but don't feel too depressed, because such a crazy agreement has no hope of success." Thankfully, Ian Gow lived long enough to know that his action had been vindicated when, on 5 July, the Government were prevented by Irish republicanism from revealing to the House the terms of the policy document to which general assent previously had been given.

Mrs. Mary Robinson, too, has been vindicated and rewarded by her own people—the majority of people in southern Ireland, who only last week elected her as their first woman president. She was quoted as saying in her acceptance speech on Friday that she intends to establish contact with individuals rather than with political parties. As a party leader, I do not resent that suggestion. I know that a head of state cannot consort with political parties, particularly those in another nation, but the new Irish president has it right because too much was asked, and has been asked, of political leaders in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Member for Newry and Armagh (Mr. Mallon) was also realistic when he told the House last Wednesday that it is foolish and unfair to advise Northern Ireland parties to "get together" to find a solution to all our problems. He used another phrase:

"We get together every day of the week." [*Official Report*, 7 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 77.]

I pay tribute to his party for its willingness to co-operate in essential matters such as agriculture, education, social security and economic issues. We should be enabled and encouraged to continue our joint endeavours in the interests of all the people of Northern Ireland. An extension of that desirable co-operation was in the mind of the hon. Member for Newry and Armagh when he contributed to the debate last Wednesday.

When the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland launched his present initiative last January, I felt that I owed it to him to accept his invitation. No one who has worked with him over the past 10 months could doubt his fairness and sincerity. That initiative might have been successful had we been permitted to content ourselves with modest objectives. Unfortunately, it was hyped to a quite unrealistic proportion, and against all my instincts we were forced on to the high-wire circus act, with all the inevitable speculation that has wrecked previous initiatives in the past 20 years. Unfortunately, the consequent disillusionment, which is keenly felt by all of us, has further destabilised the situation in Northern Ireland, and the price is being paid in the increasing loss of life, particularly in recent weeks.

Clearly, we cannot drift on as we have been since the collapse of the initiative on 5 July. We cannot expect the community to continue paying the price of escalating violence and murder. We all have a duty to restore stability by means of a modest, unspectacular progression on the road to involving elected representatives in the House and on local councils in the governance of Northern Ireland. That is provided for in the Northern Ireland section of the Queen's Speech.

Those pledges go hand in hand with the subjects of today's debate—rights, freedoms and responsibilities—because Government, Parliament and people must accept their responsibility to guarantee rights and freedoms. The Government have made a start with the presentation of two key Bills—the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill and the Criminal Justice Bill.

When the House addresses itself to the succeeding stages of those Bills, I ask right hon. and hon. Members to bear in mind the scale of lawlessness in many parts of the United Kingdom. I ask them to bear constantly in mind our fellow citizens who will be murdered before those two measures receive Royal Assent, those who will live out their lives in heartbreak and misery and the far larger category throughout these islands who cower under the shadow of intimidation of one sort or another.

All those groups are entitled to have their rights and freedoms guaranteed. Whatever reservations some right hon. and hon. Members may have about some aspects of civil liberties—I acknowledge their sincerity—I trust that it will also be recognised that the greatest civil liberty is the right to live and the freedom from fear. Those two Bills can be fashioned into instruments of assistance to the guardians of the law. The hope must be that the pendulum which in recent years has been pushed too far against the keepers of the law will be at least restored to centre point.

6.25 pm

Mr. Timothy Raison (Aylesbury): The right hon. Members for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) is entirely right to remind us of the suffering that so many people

[Mr. Timothy Raison]

have endured in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. Although I do not propose to follow him in his speech, I very much endorse his concluding words.

It was a pleasure to listen to my former area Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Durant). All those years of silence were not entirely silent; he used to telephone me occasionally, as I gather people no longer telephone him. The House appreciated what he had to say and is delighted that he has joined the ranks of the civilised once more.

As I listened to the Queen's Speech the other day, it struck me that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Home Affairs bears the lion's share of the legislative programme for this year. I did not know then that among the other measures that will be laid before us there was a further Home Office contingent. It is clear that he and his team have an enormous amount to do. I do not agree with him about everything, or with his views on capital punishment, but I have confidence in his ability to handle these matters in the way that they will have to be handled because they are so important.

I do not agree with my right hon. and learned Friend about the War Crimes Bill. I devoutly hope that the Government will not feel that they have to press this measure at all costs. We all know that dreadful crimes —probably the worst recorded in history—were committed under Nazi rule, but there are powerful arguments against this legislation which were set out with particular force in the other place. Among those who set them out were at least two distinguished Jewish noble Lords, and I believe that they struck a chord with many people in this country who thought about the matter.

We do not like the Bill's quasi-retrospective nature nor the arbitrariness of confining it to one group of war criminals. We feel that it is rather unlikely that anybody will ever be sentenced and punished and, although perhaps this is not so important in principle, we have grave doubts about whether it is right to assign police resources to this task. I do not believe that the Bill will reach the statute book, but even if it does I do not believe that it will be effectively implemented.

We all recognise that the Home Office is faced with quite peculiar difficulties in dealing with crime. The rest of the world can happily align itself to one of two camps—the reformers and the punishers. They can each pursue their paths with vehemence and vigour, but the Home Office is the point where the two arguments come together and my right hon. and learned Friend must try to reconcile those different strands in current thinking. In particular, he must face the dire question of how on earth we reduce our prison population and at the same time reduce crime. It must be said, rather pessimistically, that there has been a fall in the number of people in prison in the past few years, but at the same time there has been an increase in crime, so we are a long way from solving that problem in theory.

My right hon. and learned Friend issued a White Paper earlier this year setting out the strategy that lies behind the Criminal Justice Bill. On the whole, it was a good White Paper, but I am bound to say that I have some doubts about an important element in the philosophy which lies behind it and which is repeated in the Bill—the rejection of deterrence as a principle. The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) was adamant in support of the view that deterrence does not count for anything very much. In the White Paper, greater emphasis is placed on retribution, the notion of the "just desert" for the offender. Incidentally, "desert" is mispelt as "dessert", although that does not necessarily undermine the force of the argument.

It is an error to play down the rationality of much crime, and the White Paper makes that mistake. If one plays down the rationality of crime, inevitably one plays down the value of deterrence. There is a kind of wishful thinking about this. Many well-meaning people wish that deterrence could be proved not to work, but the evidence does not support that idea, although it is commonly said that it does.

Nigel Walker, the doyen of English criminologists, acknowledges that deterrence is less effective on the basis of the evidence than some people who made strong claims for it said a generation or two ago. On the one hand, he says, research has not justified the statement of some critics that "deterrents never work". He says that this belief is

"prompted by dislike of deterrents rather than hard evidence."

A more detailed study by Donald Lewis in *The British Journal of Criminology* in January 1986 looked at 15 studies of the general deterrent effect of long sentences: 12 apparently provided substantial support for what he called the deterrent hypothesis, two provided mixed results and only one was

"inconsistent with the deterrent hypothesis."

Other studies have shown that, as punishment for juveniles decreases, so offences rise. There is a well-known example in the book by Charles Murray, "Losing Ground", in which he describes what happened to juvenile crime in Cook county, which includes Chicago. In 1966, about 1,200 juveniles were committed to the state system of training schools. Ten years later, fewer than 400 were committed, but arrests were soaring. The number of arrests before a youth was committed to a reform school for the first time was 13·6. The risk of significant punishment for first arrests fell close to zero. As Murray

"a youngster who found criminal acts fun or rewarding and had been arrested only once or twice could have chosen to continue committing crimes through the simplest of logics: there was no reason not to."

Criminal records were increasingly being expunged. Mr. Murray used words which we cannot ignore—they are, in a sense, profoundly gloomy—but there is plenty of other evidence to show that we must face the facts that he describes.

What does that mean when it comes to the practical policy of running the penal system which is the task of my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary? Does it mean that we should lock up more and more offenders? I do not think that that necessarily follows, although we must be careful about casting away the penal sanction, but it means that we must be sure that those who are sentenced, whether to a custodial sentence or a non-custodial sentence, receive sentences which bite hard.

To be frank, one of our problems has been the way that many young people have been sentenced to non-custodial sentences. They have laughed at what they have received. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend, of all people, will clearly understand that we cannot rely on an increasingly non-custodial policy unless we, and the general public as a whole, are convinced that these sentences are having the results that they should have.

Like everybody else, we would like to believe that the operation of the penal system is about not only deterrence but seeking reform. We know that reform has proved elusive in the penal system and that the high hopes in the heyday of the borstal system, for example, have been very much dashed over the years. But we should not give up.

If we accept, as I do, that there are many cases where custody is necessary, we should accept that it is vital that it includes not only the deterrent effect of being locked up but a real attempt to provide adequate work and an adequate education in prison. We know that often those facilities are not provided. The Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts is one body that has looked at prison education more than once over the past year or two. It has come up with strong and critical recommendations about what needs to be done about education in prisons. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will give us some encouragement.

We have a time limit. There are other points that I would have wished to make, but I shall end on a different matter, to do with refugees. I have seen references in the press recently to a feeling that we should tighten up our control over people who come to this country seeking asylum. I understand the problem of economic refugees —I have seen them in Vietnam and elsewhere. I understand the intense difficulties and frustration that can be caused to the Home Office by these matters and I know that the public can be alarmed about them.

I hope that we never forget in any changes that we make the fundamental principles embodied in our commitment to the convention on refugees. I hope that there will continue to be some kind of second chance for those who are trying to find asylum if they are turned down by immigration officers and that there will be some way of having their cases looked at. We have at the moment——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I am sorry, but I must stop the right hon. Gentleman.

6.35 pm

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): I agreed with a great deal of what the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) said in his thoughtful speech. Indeed, I agreed with much more of what he said than with what the Home Secretary said in his much longer speech.

Today's debate is entitled "Rights, Freedoms and Responsibilities". I should have liked to talk about the rights, freedoms and responsibilities of the metropolitan borough of St. Helens, especially in relation to the iniquitous poll tax and its effect on the citizens of my constituency. I should have liked to draw attention to the iniquitous situation whereby, if St. Helens were receiving the financial support that the London boroughs of Westminster and Wandsworth receive, its finance officer would be able to send every poll tax payer in the borough a large cheque and not ask for any money. I should have liked to draw attention to the fact that unemployment, which features so largely in St. Helens and has always been a major factor in rate support grant in the past, does not figure at all in the standard spending assessments of local authorities. But the time factor prevents me from doing that.

As Home Office Ministers are present, I want to concentrate on the punishment and treatment of young offenders. The figures are frightening. In 1988, the last year for which figures are available the breathtaking fact was that almost 300 14-year-olds ended up in penal institutions. It is a sad commentary on our society that practices that Charles Dickens opposed continue today.

There is growing concern at the number of young suicides in our prisons. The brutal end of this system leaps at us through the suicide statistics. This year, 36 young people have killed themselves and a further 116 have tried but failed. In the last incident just a few days ago, a 15-year-old on theft charges was put in prison because no special accommodation was available. In his fragile state, that young boy hanged himself in Swansea gaol.

That shocking death is not isolated. The vulnerability of the young mind has been recognised in legislation ever since the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 stated that the type of incarceration for young people with a criminal record must be left to the discretion of the Home Secretary. It is a terrible indictment of Government policy that young people still end up in adult prisons, but we should not spend time arguing over the past. There is a desperate need now to identify the type of institution required to deal with young offenders from now on.

The situation is bad enough when young people are thrown into prison because not enough secure accommodation is available. It is even worse when there is the threat of the closure of any secure centre that has been doing valuable work in this respect; yet such an institution, one of the nation's best, could soon close if the Government do not take action now.

Red Bank school at Newton-le-Willows in my constituency is threatened because Lancashire county council, which has financed it since the local government reorganisation in 1974, is to remove itself from the school's management following a review of its child care provision. The council announced its decision in letters to the Secretary of State for Health and to the Red Bank trustees dated 26 September 1990.

The school is designated as a controlled community home with education—a CHE. Red Bank caters for youngsters who are in care for a wide variety of reasons. At present the CHE has a complement of just over 50 young people, although it could accommodate many more than that.

No criticism can be levelled at Lancashire for its review or its decision. It is the council's duty to make such decisions and, undoubtedly, the decision was forced on it by the pressures of the poll tax. The problem is, however, that within the wider provisions of Red Bank is a Home Office secure unit that caters for 26 young males who have committed serious crimes. Such has been the unit's success in dealing with those disturbed people that 23 of them now have open access rights. Their crimes range from murder and manslaughter to arson to rape to drug trafficking. The young people are detained under section 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933.

The special unit is not a harsh place, but it has rules that must be adhered to. The young people learn self-control and discipline in an affectionate environment that is sensitive to their special needs. Anyone who reads their letters cannot fail to be moved by their gratitude for what Red Bank has offered them.

The regime and philosophy of Red Bank are based upon security and care, with specialised individual programmes to meet each young person's requirements. Such provision can be offered only in such a unit. If any of the children end up in the prison system, it will be a

[Mr. John Evans]

national disgrace. Red Bank, has achieved remarkable results with some of the most difficult and traumatised young men in Britain.

The young men come not just from the north-west but from other parts of England. The secure unit is financed entirely by the Home Office but, if the rest of Red Bank closes as a result of Lancashire's decision, the secure unit will simply cease to be viable. For example, although the unit has its own gymnasium—essential to get the aggression out of many young men—it depends on the CHE's first-class facilities, such as its sports hall, sports field and swimming pool.

The north-west probation service is horrified at the prospect of closure. I have seen letters to the headmaster at the centre from the probation services of Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside, all of which have expressed serious concern at the prospect of Red Bank having to close.

Action on Red Bank is needed now. It cannot be allowed to close, and nor can matters be allowed to drift. Lancashire county council has given the statutory two years' notice of withdrawal from Red Bank, but the vital questions of staff morale and the future of jobs remain to be answered. All the expert staff at Red Bank are now looking for alternative employment with long-term guarantees and, given that they have families to support, who can blame them? They are entitled to reassurance about their prospects.

Young people must be kept out of prison. The country is horrified at the suicide rate in our prison system. We must provide more places like the Red Bank secure unit, not fewer.

I conclude by inviting the Home Secretary, who represents a constituency in the north-west, to come with me to Red Bank and see the facilities for himself. Once he has witnessed the work that is being done at the centre, I am sure that he will wish to ensure that it can continue its excellent and valuable work in future.

6.43 pm

Mr. Ivor Stanbrook (Orpington): I welcome the reference in the Gracious Speech to the affairs of Northern Ireland. The commitments to the defeat of terrorism, political and economic progress, the promotion of mutual respect and trust throughout the community and positive relations with the Republic of Ireland represent a Conservative policy for Northern Ireland which, for the first time in five years, I can support—if, that is, the words in the Gracious Speech comprehend the whole of future Government policy. But perhaps I am being over-optimistic, because there is an omission from the Gracious Speech: it contains no reference to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. I hope that that is deliberate.

Recent policy, founded on the agreement, has been a disaster. Any agreement that is conceived and implemented without consultation with the majority of the population to which it refers is bound to fail and, worse still, a device to enable a foreign state to have an automatic right of consultation in the domestic affairs of its neighbour—a neighbour to whose territory it solemnly lays claim in its c onstitution—is a constitutional outrage that cannot possibly endure. I hope that the words in the Gracious Speech mean that the Government are actively seeking to remove that obstacle to peace, stability and reconciliation in Northern Ireland and to replace it with an agreement more appropriate to the honour and integrity of two neighbouring sovereign states.

I welcome the firm language in the Gracious Speech about the defeat of terrorism. It is much to be preferred to what has become Ministers' ritual utterance after every terrorist outrage—that we shall never surrender to terrorism. We all know that the Government will never surrender to terrorism. What we want to hear from them more often is that we shall defeat terrorism. We want to see the Government taking the offensive against the IRA. It is reasonable to expect and to say that the IRA will not be defeated by military means alone, but there are better political ways of defeating it than appeasement of the Irish Republic and its "constitutional imperative" to take over Northern Ireland.

I am sorry that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland recently saw fit to say that, if only the IRA laid down its arms, a united Ireland would be possible. That is yet another illustration of the way in which the Government seem always to be appealing to the Republican minority in Northern Ireland rather than to the Unionist majority, whose views are constantly undervalued or ignored.

We have already heard several references in the debate to Ian Gow, murdered by the IRA, who sacrificed his career, and then his life, for the Unionist cause. He was my dear friend. He was a strong opponent of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. He was generally recognised as one of the best parliamentarians of his generation, displaying not only courage but great political skill and judgment in the causes that he served in the House.

Is it enough for us to lament Ian's passing, pay tribute to his qualities and then pass on to other things as we do for colleagues who die from natural causes? He was struck down by vile assassins. In doing what it did, the IRA was striking not only at him but at every Member of the House and at parliamentary democracy. Is it sufficient merely to bemoan our loss? Should we not marvel at the excellence of the cause that inspired such a man to lay down his career, and ultimately his life? Should we not seek to carry on his good work in this matter? Should we not strike back at the evil thing that deliberately destroyed such a life? Ian founded the Friends of Ulster, a trust established to remind the British people of the value of the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Such a cause is of even greater value in honouring his memory than a charitable trust.

I hope in due course to hear from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that the Government will at last give up their insane attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable but will, in future, adopt a policy of integration of the Province with the rest of the United Kingdom. That is a policy of which Ian Gow would certainly have approved.

6.49 pm

Mrs. Audrey Wise (Preston): Two years ago, my speech in this debate took the form of an alternative Queen's Speech for women. I want to consider what has happened since then, after two more years of this Government who are so neglectful of women's interests.

The biggest thing that has happened is the poll tax, the most amazing feature of which is that it is levied on millions of women who have no income. Only this

Government could think of such a breathtaking idea. The Government have been boasting about independent taxation, but they have tied women who have no income completely to their husbands, causing them to be treated like appendages and burdens. The Government have penalised one-income families, most of whom have young children.

They have refused even to give women access to rebates in their own right, and they have forced an unprecedented number of people into debt and into the courts.

While all that has been happening, the Government have kept their eyes firmly closed to the misery that they have created. There is no mention in the Queen's Speech of that problem, and the Government have no intention of doing anything to relieve it.

In order to disguise their lack of commitment to women's issues, there has been some fanfare abut the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Mrs. Rumbold), who is trumpeted as the Minister for women. Her actual responsibilities include animal welfare, Sunday trading, British summer time, inner cities and women's issues. The latter takes the form of chairing a ministerial group which has existed for some time, which was previously chaired by a man and which meets three or four times a year. That just about describes the sense of urgency that the Government feel about the issue. In contrast, the Labour party is committed to a proper and powerful Ministry for Women, headed by a Cabinet Minister. As well as introducing legislation, it will examine all Government policies and actions for their impact on women, and ensure alteration when necessary.

Another press fanfare greeted the Government's latest new earnings survey. We were told that women were closing the gap between their wages and men's. Closer examination reveals no cause for headlines. It is true that women's earnings grew very slightly more than men's between April 1988 and April 1990. However, average male earnings are £94·01 more than average female earnings. Women's earnings remain very much lower even when reckoned on an hourly basis, thus disregarding longer hours and overtime premiums. My calculations show that, on the most optimistic way of looking at the figures, the gap would not be closed for full-time workers for at least 22 years. I just hope that women will not be so patient.

My calculations take account only of full-timers, disregarding the basic flaw in the statistics which exclude many part-time employees precisely because they are low-paid. The lowest paid are simply not counted by the Government in the new earnings survey.

In case anyone thinks that large numbers of women work part-time because they do not need the money, I can state that it is precisely because women have responsibilities for children and other dependants that they seek part-time work. That same factor means that they need their wages—and better wages—very much indeed.

Part-time workers, temporary workers and home workers are being subjected to ever-worsening conditions as well as to low pay. The EC wants to improve the position of women workers, but this Government have set their face against all the EC initiatives. In particular, they opposed a draft directive on part-time work.

My union, USDAW—the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers—organises many part-timers. We have a slogan:

"Full-time rights for part-time workers."

We know a lot about it and we are furious that the Government should have stated in evidence to a House of Lords Select Committee:

"While there are clearly advantages which some part-time workers suffer in relation to full-timers, it is possible to see this as a price which part-timers, in particular women, are prepared to pay for the opportunity to fit work into other commitments."

Women do not voluntarily decide that they are willing to pay the price of poverty pay and insecurity. They do it because they have no alternative. Employers know that, and they take advantage of it.

The Government have also said that they prefer to leave such matters

"for voluntary agreement between employer and employee, either individually or through collective bargaining."

Collective bargaining needs trade unions strong enough to face employers on equal terms. This Government have place every possible difficulty in the path of the unions, and they then have the nerve to call them in aid when opposing measures such as the EC draft directive.

The Government demand that employees show a reasonable level of commitment to an employer before acquiring rights against that employer. Those working eight hours but less than 16 hours a week must work continuously for the same employer for at least five years to qualify even for basic employment rights. The Government call for commitment by workers to employers. We ask: where is the commitment by employers to their workers?

Exactly the same story can be told about the draft directive on temporary workers. The Government have stated:

"Temporary workers do not necessary want the same conditions as permanent workers. They may prefer other advantages to those of security, such as flexibility to work when and how they wish."

Temporary work with no contract is on the increase, and the main characteristic of the new temporary work is not flexibility, but simply the likelihood of being pushed around and then pushed out when that suits the employer.

In the past two years, no progress has been made on rights for part-timers, temporary workers and home workers. Over the past decade, their position has become worse, especially for those who have not yet joined a trade union.

Only this Government in the EC oppose a draft directive giving rights to parental leave. In March this year, on behalf of the House, I went to an EC women's conference in Brussels. The women from the other 11 member states felt tremendous anger against the British Government for depriving them of that improvement. That has done the reputation of this country no good at all in the eyes of the women of Europe.

The Tories parade themselves as the party of the family. However, when people throughout Europe, including Britain, were asked to choose the priorities for family policy, housing was top of the list. This Government preside over ever-increasing homelessness. When I spoke in the debate on the Loyal Address two years ago, homelessness was overwhelmingly a London problem. It is now nationwide. We have a housing crisis in Preston as a result of homelessness and Government attacks on council housing. Women are suffering agonies because they have no home for their children. Anyone really concerned about families would ensure that they had decent homes.

The availability of child care was second in the list of people's priorities for family policy. Again, Britain's

[Mrs. Audrey Wise]

record under this Tory Government is deplorable in that regard. There has been one small improvement, with the abolition of the tax on workplace nurseries. That was important more for its principle and potential than for any mass effect, because very few workplace nurseries exist.

The Opposition welcome any good quality nursery provision. However, most of us would prefer to see local council provision so that changing a job does not mean having to change a child's nursery. What is happening now? The Prime Minister's favourite council, Wandsworth, is planning to close all its day nurseries. A mother might have to pay as much as £100 a week for a private nursery in Wandsworth. Even in Preston, the going rate is around £50 a week.

Training is another imperative if women are to have real equal opportunities. There is no national strategy for training of women. Indeed, the newest training scheme caused the chief executive of the Equal Opportunities Commission to express great concern at the discriminatory effects of the new arrangements.

Women going out to work can mean women improving their standard of living, getting job satisfaction and laying the groundwork for satisfactory long-term employment. However, too often it does not mean that. Too often, women are driven out to work by mortgages, rents and poll tax. They are struggling to maintain—not improve—their standard of living, often doing jobs that are damaging to health, working when they are over-stressed and worried about their children.

Health and safety at work is still too much seen in terms of accidents and not enough in terms of functional health. However, jobs such as supermarket checkout operator involve twisting, lifting one-handedly and repetitive movements which cause great strain to the back, arms and neck. But what can the Health and Safety Executive do with a total budget of £120 million and an inspectorate of 200 fewer than it had when the Government came to office?

A Government who were really concerned about women would make sure that there was good child care, good training, healthier work conditions and better pay for women. They would help unions instead of hindering them.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry but I must stop the hon. Lady. I call Sir Rhodes Boyson.

6.59 pm

Sir Rhodes Boyson (Brent, North): I welcome the proposed war crimes Bill. It is a matter of principle. Certain events in the Gulf, where war crimes may be happening again, make it even more topical then it was before.

The rights, freedoms and responsibilities about which I am concerned are those about which my constituents are also concerned. One responsibility is the state of the environment, as my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Durant) mentioned. The Gracious Speech states:

"My Government will continue to work for the regeneration of our cities."

We allowed the destruction of the inner city, and that has occurred over 20 years. Unless we are careful, we shall destroy suburbia at the same time by overbuilding, destroying sports fields, and back-garden development. In 20 years we will ask, "Why did we not stop it before it got into this state?"

The Government should take note of three simple issues which I have mentioned before and all of which are supported by hon. Members from my area, irrespective of party affiliation, and by hon. Members from big cities. First, no house should be allowed to be knocked down without planning permission. One can knock a house down now and make it look like a bomb site and then apply to build something. To buy the peace, the application goes through. If we need planning permission before we build, there should be planning permission to knock down.

Secondly, it is against justice and against the little man and woman who have saved all their lives to own a house, that if a planning application goes through a local council there is no appeal by the little people who live round the area. However, if a planning application is turned down by a council, there is a right of appeal by the developer to the Secretary of State. That is against justice, freedoms and responsibilities.

Thirdly, no planning application should be allowed until people own the land concerned or until they have a letter saying that they agree to the development. Several years ago, in respect of people living in 700 houses, a planning application went in and the person concerned did not own one centimetre of land. The worry of the old people in that area was such that I had to go from door to door to settle them down before they were almost forced by salesmen at the door to sell at reduced prices.

In the area that I have the honour to represent, some of the things that housing associations are building are certainly worse than I have seen any councils build, apart from the fashion of the tower block. One evening in my constituency, I visited 150 people who were gathered because of a further development going on behind their homes. They lived in a housing development with hardly any garages or gardens—it was a window box society. They had done their best to make it better. They then found that a sports field behind them was subject to a planning application which would confine them in a concrete jungle and, to mix metaphors—why not, if one is enjoying it?—it was worse than the back-to-back developments of the 19th century.

There is a right to a decent standard of education. All of us know that there is a problem with education standards at present. If hon. Members do not know that, they must have been having no surgeries and not opening their letters. The Government have five things to do. The Gracious Speech states:

"My Government will continue to take action to improve quality in education."

I thought that I should state where the Government should take action to help them along their way.

First, the seven-plus tests are good, but they should be made and conducted by teachers, not by an educational establishment which has hardly seen children for the past 20 years. Tests that take one and a half weeks, when the sadly demoted 11-plus test took two hours, and that come from outside are totally wrong. If we put six infant teachers in a room with six heads of infant schools, they could make the tests in an hour. They do not need £6 million and all the committees and bureaucracy that are attached to it.

Secondly, we need specialist schools for children aged 14 and upwards. All our competitors have such schools —Russia, Japan, Germany and Sweden, irrespective of their economic system. Such schools must be brought in. The Labour party destroyed the grammar schools which 75 per cent. of the population want back. They will not come back, but specialist schools should. Any party that takes up that suggestion, brings in specialist schools for pupils aged 14 to 18 and trains them for proper apprenticeships will have the support of masses of people in this country. Thirdly, I believe in grant-maintained schools, but every school in the country should have to vote on whether to become grant-maintained.

Fourthly, if we are to have three-year degree courses, we must maintain A-level standards. Fifthly, there must be an improvement in teachers' salaries. That matters more than buildings or anything else. We must have good teachers more than lower pupil-teacher ratios. Good teachers are more important than a reduction in the size of classes. Any teacher who can control 20 children can control 30 children. Those who cannot control 20 children would have a riot with a dead rabbit, and there is nothing we can do about that. One fears for the teachers who cannot cope inside the classroom.

In a debate on education in July, the hon. Member for Durham, North-West (Ms. Armstrong) referred to my views on the assisted places scheme as given in a review that I did for *The Times* higher education supplement. I explained that in at least one case the results were very different from what was intended. The hon. Lady kindly sent me a note that she was to speak, but, unfortunately, I had already left for a radio broadcast so I was not here to comment.

I fully support the assisted places scheme. Anything that one starts finishes rather differently from what one started. In that review I indicated how the differences work. I still strongly deplore the Labour party's stated policy to end the assisted places scheme, the remaining grammar schools, grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges, all in pursuit of an egalitarian, socialist education policy that was long ago long left behind by the rest of the world.

Another right is the right to movement. Twenty thousand people in my constituency travel by tube to London every day. The third biggest debate in my constituuency—I will tell nobody tonight what the biggest debate is; it has nothing to do with their Member of Parliament, incidentially—is about getting to work on time without having to set off early and getting back in time before the evening meal. We are creating a sandwich society. There are sandwich bars everywhere. Passengers never know when they will get into London, and they never know when they will get out.

I welcome the fact that transport investment has gone up to £16 billion over three years, which is £4 billion more than the previous three years and £2 billion more than we thought it would be last week. We need many more tube lines in London. It is not good enough playing around extending bits and pieces. If we are to get London right, four or five new tube lines must be built in the 1990s.

We should privatise British Rail, which is what I would prefer to do, or invest in it. We cannot leave it as a running sore for which the Government take responsibility. Yesterday, I was trying to get from Manchester to London so that I could be here today, but there was a guards' strike. The first train from Manchester to London was at 5.30. I could have walked to London in that time—I do not mind getting up at 6 o'clock in the morning. Fortunately, we have privatised British Airways, and there was no strike. In the case of British Rail, the customer does not matter, because the railways are still a nationalised industry.

I have two more minutes, I believe. On Europe——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: One minute.

Sir Rhodes Boyson: Just over one minute. I am obeying the Chair. I shall miss out something. Hon. Members will never know what I was going to say about Europe. They will have to wait for another speech.

In Brent, the money from the standard spending assessment has gone up this year from £190 million to £216 million, which is a 13·5 per cent. increase. Provided that the Labour party and the Liberal party in Brent behave properly, which would be a new experience, but there is still time for it to happen, because I have always believed in the forgiveness of sums—*[Interruption.]*—and the forgiveness of sins, and the salvation of men—and provided that those parties co-operate with the biggest party in Brent, which is the Conservative party, I believe that we can bring the community charge there down to below £400. If we can do that, people will be able to afford more sandwiches and to move their children to the grant-maintained schools more than they can at present, and then they will come and see me in the constituency to ask me my views on Europe.

7.9 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness and Sutherland): As the hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) said, we may be living in a "sandwich society" in which one never knows when one is coming in or getting out, but no one could describe this as a "sandwich debate" because, as the hon. Gentleman found, hon. Members know when they are going to be cut off in midstream.

The debate is about rights and responsibilities. One right which is not protected in this House is the right of minority parties to be heard. We heard an interesting speech, lasting 50 minutes from the Labour Front-Bench spokesman, with a good deal of which I agree. Although an effective speech may be made in 10 minutes—the right hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison) made such a speech—it is not possible to do justice in that time to the political philosophy of the Liberal Democrats in the matters facing the country. Therefore, I shall not attempt to deal with or even to refer to all the matters that concern us deeply. It is right to note that the public will be mystified when reading the report of the debate because there will be so little in it about the views of the Liberal Democrats, and they will comment on the fact that it is not possible to develop those matters.

I begin by referring to the speech within a speech by the Home Secretary on the merger between BSB and Sky. His scant regard for the illegalities struck a jarring note at the beginning of a speech in which he thought fit to take the official Opposition to task for their attitude to the poll tax. The fact that the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not think it odd that the Prime Minister had not notified him about the impending illegality was, frankly, bizarre. The Home Secretary shows himself more sensitive to certain breaches of the law than to others especially, it appears, when his friends are involved.

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

I submit that it is not in the viewers' interests for satellite television to be further disrupted now; nor it is is it in their interests to allow such ownership concentration in the long run as now appears likely. When a non-domestic satellite service can reach 15 to 20 per cent. of the total television audience, it should then be subject to the same ownership rules as other television services. Then, a level playing field will be achieved, the public will be protected from ownership abuse and those who have invested in the new services will be enabled to make a fair return. Unless the Government act, the merger threatens to undermine the Independent Television Commission before it has come into operation, and will mean that the Broadcasting Act 1990, which we spent so long labouring to put on the statute book last Session, will not be worth the paper on which it is written.

The Home Secretary did not touch on a further point arising from the merger—the threat to the D-Mac technology that is used by BSB. The technology has been developed in Britain. It has been supported by the European Broadcasting Union and has the potential to become the world leader for the new high-quality televisions of the future. The Government should underwrite the ownership of the satellites and the uplinking station, and reallocate the BSB frequencies. The terrestrial channels could be duplicated on those frequencies, using D-Mac. Thus, if they chose, people could receive the main services with far higher quality than now, and those with poor or non-existent reception would have the opportunity to improve their service. Alternatively, the frequencies could be handed to the BBC or jointly to the BBC and the IBA, which could run them on a public service basis. Channels could be designated for news, public information, sports, arts or education. It would be a tragedy for the future of British engineering and electronics if D-Mac technology were allowed to wither. Ministers must not allow their enthusiasm to promote News International's operations to damage Britain's and Europe's long-term industrial and broadcasting interests.

Most of this debate has naturally focused on the Government's proposals for the reform of the criminal law. That is scarcely surprising because we meet against an extremely sombre background of lawlessness and criminal outrage which is probably unparalleled in western Europe. I beg the Home Secretary not to underplay this by making trivial partisan points across the Floor of the House in our major debate of the year on this matter.

We have witnessed serious rioting in Trafalgar square, involving the wounding of many people—innocent passers-by and policemen alike. We have witnessed the devastation of Strangeways prison in Manchester. We have been shocked by the repeated suicides of young unconvicted people in our prisons, most notably at Armley in Leeds. Terrorists have struck down our citizens, and not only in the Province of Northern Ireland. In this country they struck down our colleague, Ian Gow, who was a valued Member of the House.

In the past year, the gravest miscarriages of justice have been revealed, with the wrongful imprisonment of our citizens coming to light after years and years of protest and investigation. We have had the highest recorded crime rates in our history. We know that the public are showing a growing loss of confidence in the probity and effectiveness of some of our police forces.

It is against that appalling background that the Home Secretary's programme for the year must be judged. The Criminal Justice Bill is a major measure of reform. Much of it is to be welcomed. Because I am confined in the debate to 10 minutes, I do not propose to dwell on that Bill, except to make one adverse point. I regret that so much weight rests on the proposal to interfere with the income support arrangements in substitution for fines. That will place the burden of the penalty on innocent families, not on the criminal.

Against the background to which I have alluded, it is a sad comment on the Government's priorities that the Home Secretary himself gave so much attention to the War Crimes Bill. The right hon. Member for Aylesbury made the case against that Bill and I do not propose to repeat his arguments. Indeed, the case for such a Bill was comprehensively demolished in another place. The fact that it should now take up valuable legislative time seems a gross diversion of parliamentary effort.

In the two minutes left to me, I conclude by making an appeal to the Home Secretary—that when he approaches the matter of criminal law reform, he will recognise the structural defects of his own office and the fact that, by dividing the responsibility for law reform between the Lord Chancellor and himself, and through his own Department's involvement not only in matters of law reform, but in the necessary maintenance of internal security, he must too often face a conflict of interest between the protection of human rights and of citizen's rights, and the maintenance of law and order.

I do not think that that is an appropriate structure of government. That is why I advocate that the right hon. and learned Gentleman seriously considers the possibility of establishing a Ministry of Justice, with full responsibility for law reform and the administration of justice. It is perhaps because we do not have such a Ministry that the Government have not introduced a proposal to enact the findings of the Law Commission and encode the entire criminal law in an Act of 210 sections. That would have made for accessibility, comprehensibility, consistency and certainty. In the words of the Lord Chancellor himself:

"It would have saved money and time at all levels."

That would be a major contribution to the changes that we need if our criminal justice system is to be restored to effectiveness.

7.19 pm

Mr. Robert Boscawen (Somerton and Frome): This year, my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary will have some of the most important and major parts of the Government's programme to handle—in particular, the Criminal Justice Bill, to which the hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) just referred. In particular, my right hon. and learned Friend intends to introduce measures to increase parental responsibility. I do not wish to dwell on that side, but I hope that he will also consider counselling of hard-pressed families, particularly families in which the marriage is in difficulties. When a couple splits up, it causes a great deal of pressure on the single mother and, in consequence, on the children. In many ways, that can affect the crime figures. So often, it is children from families under such pressure in the home who go wrong. My right hon. and

learned Friend knows as well as I and all other hon. Members know that rising crime among young persons is one of the saddest features of today's society.

Will my right hon. and learned Friend ensure that his colleagues whose duty it is to assist the creation of family centres do so? Family centres are a good idea, because they bring in the voluntary element as well as the National Health Service and local authority social services to counsel families who are in danger, before the trouble starts.

Several of my hon. Friends have mentioned what is perhaps not the most important but is nevertheless a worrying proposal in the Queen's Speech—that to reactivate the Bill on war crimes. My right hon. and learned Friend and his colleagues know that I do not like the proposal. I suppose that I am one of the few hon. Members in a position to represent the thousands of people in my generation who were front-line service men in the war, albeit at a junior level. Many of us witnessed or heard at first hand about the terrible atrocities that took place in central Europe 45 or 50 years ago. We saw more of such horror than perhaps most people have seen in a lifetime. It gave us many sleepless nights.

No one who took part in those terrible days at the end of the second world war would go soft on war crimes. But it is a mistake for Her Majesty's Government to introduce a War Crimes Bill which has retrospective effect and seeks to catch a few of those who remained in Britain or escaped here, as my right hon. and learned Friend said, to evade capture and trial for the atrocious crimes committed all those years ago.

I do not wish to rehearse the legal reasons and the legal and mechanical difficulties of obtaining evidence and identification, which were so well rehearsed in another place before the House rose last summer. They were all valid arguments. I am sorry that my right hon. Friends did not find those arguments overwhelming. I feel strongly that we should not resurrect those terrible atrocities now, rake over them before the courts, go through all the lurid details of the massacre of innocent people, and inevitably raise the demon of vengeance in certain people's minds, as we would be bound to do. We should say, "Let bygones be bygones; 50 years is a very long time ago."

We in the United Kingdom have nothing whatever to reproach ourselves for in the way in which we handled the Nazi criminals at the end of the second world war. First, we pursued and our leaders accepted for us a policy of unconditional surrender. By doing so, we were able to take absolute power to deal with the criminal masters of Nazi Germany, and we did so.

The war crimes trials were stopped after a few years, as my right hon. and learned Friend and others have said. Perhaps it is not understood why that was so. Those of us who were near at hand and saw the trials know why they were stopped. The inevitable sentence for murder in the British zone of Germany was the capital sentence, as it was in the United Kingdom at the time. In consequence, morning after morning, week after week and month after month, British soldiers had to lead a score or more of men and women to the gallows. That had a great effect on the morale of the people stationed there. We were as human then as we are today. The trials had more effect on us than on the indigenous population, who of course were interested only in their own survival in the terrible conditions of food, housing and heat shortages.

I ask the Government once again to reconsider their policy, and not rake up the matter again. A great friend of mine who died earlier this year spent two years at Sachsenhausen outside Dresden. He was one of the two or three score British soldiers sentenced to the concentration camps for enabling Jews to escape through their wire into our camps and out into the world. He lived in indescribable conditions. I and my late colleague, Airey Neave, and others—I believe that Mr. Deputy Speaker, who has just left the Chair, was also one of them—helped those men when I first came to the House. We campaigned to give them extra help to overcome the indescribable difficulties which they suffered.

I went to see my friend, Mr. Jim Franklin, in January this year, as he was dying in incredible stomach pain caused by what he suffered in the concentration camp. He said to me, "Don't let them do it. It is all too long ago. Let's not rake up that wicked, evil past that we all suffered." I hope that my colleagues on the Front Bench will remember that view.

7.29 pm

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I agree with the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen) that forgiveness is far more important than revenge. I am perhaps one of the few people on Opposition Benches who greatly regret the Government's intention to reintroduce the war crimes legislation.

Over the past 11 years when I have listened to Queen's Speeches, I have regretted what was in them and what was omitted from them. On this occasion I am most concerned about the omissions. Although today's subject for debate is rights, I should like briefly to put on record my anxieties about the situation in the middle east. I want to see Kuwait free and under democratic Government. I do not go along with all this heady stuff about a new world order, if the conflict is settled by the use of force.

Such a conflict would be just like any other war—ordinary people would be killed. It would be almost as pointless as the many other wars that have been proclaimed as wars to end wars. If we are to talk about some new world order, we must ensure that right succeeds as a result of peaceful means. That is why making sanctions work is one of the most important tasks. I do not mind if it takes a long time. We should be prepared to accept that it might take even up to five years. If a solution is found as a result of sanctions and peaceful endeavours, it will be far more worth while in the long term.

I understand why George Bush and our Prime Minister have reservations about sanctions. So long as they preside over greed societies, they must have reservations about how long they can persuade people to forgo profits on trade and make sanctions work. I wish that world leaders who talk about the use of force spent more time ensuring that sanctions worked. I welcomed the Government's action in expelling two Iraqi officials who appeareded to try to break sanctions. I hope that the Government are applying all the pressure they can to ensure that sanctions work.

If we are to talk about a new world order, we must ensure that we put principle and people's lives before profit. We should also remember that profit is part of the problem in the middle east. We have been only too happy to sell arms to almost any obnoxious regime and we should consider that seriously.

[Mr. Andrew F. Bennett]

To make a new world order succeed, we must make sanctions work and tackle the issue of arms. We must make certain that the test ban treaty operates, so that we do not continue polluting the world with nuclear material. It is appalling that the Government should go ahead with a nuclear test on Wednesday. If we had any intent to make the non-proliferation discussions of a few months ago or the test ban treaty work, we should be prepared to forgo that test. I do not understand how anyone can believe that our Trident has a useful purpose or our test any value.

If we want a new world order, we must consider arms manufacture across the world. I welcome Labour's commitment to an arms conversion agency in the United Kingdom. The British Government should press the European Community to set up such an agency within the EC. We should also consider that issue in eastern Europe. Far too many people depend on making arms for a job. So long as we make arms in such quantities, we shall store up further conflicts for ourselves. If we are to talk of a new world order, we must eliminate the possibility of those conflicts.

We need to find alternative work for those involved in arms manufacture. We must rid the world of so many arms. It is sad how, first, are are procured by major powers, then sold second-hand to second-rate powers and, finally, find their way into the third world. Each time they are used for destruction and finally they may find their way to terrorist organisations. The United Nations or the EC should look hard at whether they can buy up those second-hand arms and take them out of circulation.

For most of the past 10 years I have been secretary to the parliamentary Labour party's civil liberties group. We have often tabled an amendment to the address, listing some items that we regret the Government have not tackled. During that period the task has got harder and harder. Our amendment, which has not been selected for debate, lists all our regrets at the Government's failure to act and the areas where they have acted wrongly in reducing civil rights. The problem is that the list that we should like to record has got longer, so that it is difficult to keep it within the 250 words to stay in order.

I cannot refer to all the items on the list, but I should like to refer to a few. There is a little in the Criminal Justice Bill, which I welcome, but not much. If we are to make our prisons work effectively, we must give prisoners far more rights. It is easy to give rights to people whom we approve of. The trouble is that we must give civil liberties to people of whom we least approve. That is a problem with prisoners. They are in prison to be punished, but we must ensure that they have a just system in prison. By the way we treat them, we must show how we want them to treat society when they are released. They must be told clearly what their rights are, the conditions for parole and the conditions that they must observe when they are out on parole. As the Bill progresses, I hope that I can argue further about that issue of rights.

It is sad that, during the past 10 years, we have not had a freedom of information Act. Many hon. Members talk proudly about how the new Select Committees work effectively. So many of their supposed triumphs involve getting information out of the Government. We should not need Select Committees for that. If we had a freedom of information Act, that information would be readily available without the whole paraphernalia of Select Committees and without the need to convince Members that they are being useful because they tease out information from Ministers which should be freely available.

I agree with my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that we should speed up trials. I realise that there is sometimes a conspiracy between some prisoners and their lawyers who tell them that they are better off on remand than convicted because conditions are supposedly better. Speedy trials are extremely important, particularly for those who are found innocent and should not have spent a long time on remand.

In particular, I should like to press the Home Secretary on what is happening in Manchester. It is regrettable that, following Strangeways, the Government have been unable to remove more remand prisoners from police cells. Some policemen like the overtime involved, although that presents the Greater Manchester police authority with the problem of paying for it. The Home Secretary must consider that. Many of the cells where remand prisoners are kept are unsuitable and cause major problems to the efficient running of the police stations. We should not be paying overtime to policemen who look after remand prisoners there. The Home Secretary should deal with that problem rapidly.

Several constituents with relatives in the Gulf have expressed their anxieties about the way in which the media have treated them. As someone in public service, I must accept a certain amount of media attention whether I like it or not, but I have a great deal of sympathy for my constituents who are under a great deal of pressure. I hope that legislation on privacy will be introduced in due course.

Why have not the Government included proposals to reform the private Bill procedure? Given that this is a slack Session it would have been possible to include such proposals in the Queen's Speech. I regret that the Queen's Speech does not do more to confer civil rights on all our people, particularly those who are already at a disadvantage.

7.39 pm

Mr. Ivan Lawrence (Burton): I welcome the Government's programme as set out in the Gracious Speech, including the War Crimes Bill. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen) will forgive me if I do not dwell on my reasons for welcoming that Bill.

I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be there to see this programme implemented and that she will still be there to implement the programme that will emerge from the Queen's Speech in the Parliament which will follow the next general election.

It saddens and distresses me to see respected Conservative colleagues venting their frustrations on the party for which they have fought for so long and with such distinction. Tearing ourselves apart in response to goading from the media can do no good to the party, the country or those who are behaving in such a destructive manner. Do they really imagine that a party that does not stay loyal and united behind perhaps the most successful and purposeful Prime Minister that the nation has known in peacetime this century will continue to command the loyalty of the people come the next election?

It is a peculiar kind of conceit that imagines that this nation will admire disunity at a time of a threat to world stability and when the economic going gets rough. Will our forces in the Gulf be able to fight more steadfastly if their political leaders are in disarray? Will the tyrant Saddam Hussein be more easily removed if our leadership is divided? Will we be more able to stand up to the threat to our national sovereignty posed by those in Europe who want us to become part of a Euro-federal superstate where 80 per cent. of the laws will be made in Brussels?

I hope that common sense will prevail, that there will be no wounding leadership contest and that we can concentrate on implementing the programme set out in the Gracious Speech and on winning the next election.

The programme for this Session has been called thin —would that it were so. I fear that "other measures" are already proliferating, as will the European measures that are likely to keep us here night after night. If there were any thinness, I should welcome the opportunity for my right hon. and hon. Friend's to get out into the constituencies to communicate our policies better. If we did so, the public opinion polls would be substantially more in our favour.

Crime, particularly violent crime, destroys not only the victim, but the society in which it flourishes, because it engenders fear. Only a tiny proportion of elderly people are assaulted, but all elderly people fear to go out into the streets at night in case of assault.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): The same goes for women on their own.

Mr. Lawrence: Yes.

I can remember no Government who have striven with more determination to take every reasonable step and opportunity to reduce crime, to strengthen the armoury of the law and the forces of law and order—sparing little expense. We now have more policemen, who are better paid, better equipped, better led and furnished with better laws, than ever before. We now have more courts, with more powers and better trained personnel.

Community involvement has been ensured through the neighbourhood watch scheme. A charter of rights for victims has been established. Community penalties are now widely used. There is the urban action programme. Now the Criminal Justice Bill advances the progress achieved several stages further and is most welcome.

I hope that the Criminal Justice Bill will frighten more potentially violent criminals from offending. They will be aware of the longer sentences to be given where appropriate. Those sentences will be further increased with the loss of parole for the sexual offender. If a capital punishment clause were added to the Bill, it would be even more frightening and more successful in deterring the violent offender. If we frightened the offender from offending, perhaps members of society would be less frightened of going into the streets.

The Bill will also affect the incidence of crime committed by young people, by placing a greater responsibility on parents. Although the average age of offending is rising, it still stands at only 16 years. It is too easy to blame teachers for lack of discipline: without parental responsibility and discipline in the home, teachers cannot hope to succeed. Both kinds of discipline are necessary.

However, we must be careful about trials involving children. If we intend to protect children from court appearances, we must be careful not to remove the right to question them properly. If we do that, we may find that innocent people are convicted through mistaken identity evidence that has not been properly investigated.

There is a manifest paradox about the crime figures. On the one hand, we have a record of action and achievement in introducing measures to control crime: on the other hand the criminal statistics are high, and in some areas they are rising. What is the explanation? The answer is there to be seen. Much more opportunistic crime is being committed, because people leave car doors, front doors and windows open. I do not know whether that is a reflection of a more prosperous society, but if fewer people left such doors open, we would not be talking about the increase in crime as recorded in the last quarter.

It is also important to consider how crime is reported in a free society. With better communications, and the police's more humane treatment of women who complain about assault, we must accept that more crimes are reported. Insurance companies now require that an offence should be reported to the police before they pay out. Obviously more crime is reported, but that almost certainly does not mean more crimes are being committed. Common sense on the crime statistics, should prevail, rather than the silly, simplistic criticism of the Opposition.

Do the Opposition have a better programme than ours? I listened carefully to the recipe of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) for less crime, but I am far from convinced, and I am sure that my constituents will share my doubts. I am doubtful whether elected police authorities would contribute to a better, more efficient and more effective police force, especially when the only purpose of electing them is to give those authorities more political control, particularly in Labour areas.

I have great difficulty in seeing how the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act 1989 would strengthen our fight against terrorism. I cannot see why it is necessary to have another independent police complaints authority when we already set one up under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984—especially when former or serving police officers are banned from membership. The commitments outlined by the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook stopped short of spending any more money on law and order lest his right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor is angry with him.

It is unlikely that the prison system would be improved by the Opposition. Improvements were just as necessary when the Labour party was last in Government, but all it managed to do was cut capital spending by 20 per cent., while the prison population rose by 14·5 per cent. In its last election manifesto, the Labour party did not bother to mention prisons at all.

The Opposition have voted not only against the Prevention of Terrorism Acts, but against the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, the Public Order Act 1986 and the Criminal Justice Act 1988. With that track record, how can the Labour party expect to be treated with any real credibility when it says that it will take law and order seriously? I do not find the Opposition's case convincing and nor will my constituents.

In the real world, we enjoy a free society only because there are laws that protect rights and help to enforce responsibilities. The question is, by what kind of criminal

[Mr. Lawrence]

justice system can we enforce those rights and protect them? The answer is that the system must have sanctions. Some of which need only be educational; others need to protect society; and some need to be so severe that they frighten would-be offenders from offending.

Such a system needs to have a balance and also the support of the people. I believe that the proposed programme is balanced, and I hope that we shall have sufficient time during the current parliamentary Session to go out to the people to explain how important this law and our achievement is.

7.49 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I wish to talk about the right of people to have decent health care and the Government's responsibility to provide it. Two news items caught my attention last week. The first, in *The Independent* on Wednesday was headlined

"NHS cuts 4,500 beds to save cash."

The second one, in the *Morning Star* on Saturday described how leave for key staff in London hospitals had been cancelled.

The first headline referred to the crisis facing the national health service, which was brought on, not by inefficient management or overpaid staff, but by a Government who have deliberately underfunded the national health service for the past 11 years. The survey in *The Independent* included beds that had been closed purely for the lack of cash in the past financial year. All the managers who replied to the survey were clear on the key reason for the bed losses—to wipe out deficits by the end of the financial year, whatever the cost in pain and misery. The survey underestimated the number of bed losses. It included my own local health authority, Calderdale, and said that the bed loss was 76, but the actual number is 99.

The last time that the national health service faced such a crisis was in 1987. Then as now, there was a massive bed closure and the Prime Minister stepped in and ordered a review—the rest is history. We are now stuck with the dreadful National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, with which nobody agreed but the Prime Minister and a few of her advisers. The Prime Minister based her model for new health care on the United States market structure. Early experience of that market-oriented model shows that it has abjectly and spectacularly failed.

In my health authority last week we heard that a new hospital that should have been built had been put back yet another four years. The excuse given was the slump in the property market that has forced the regional health authority to delay its capital programme. I do not believe that the Government seriously intended to build the new hospital, but they closed wards and a laundry to make way for it and have thus seriously damaged the service. The recent advice from local consultants is that because of those closures, waiting lists will rise to more than 1,000 in a year, and in the gynaecological department, 500 women will have to wait more than 12 months for treatment. Those closures have obviously caused a great deal of damage to the service and many people on waiting lists will become ill; some may even die.

My local example also shows that this year's bed closures could take waiting lists in England to more than 1 million for the first time in the national health service. That is a disgraceful statistic for a Government who pretend to spend a lot of money on health care. I do not believe that the extra £2·4 billion—the pre-election bribe announced by the Chancellor—will do much to alleviate the crisis. The Government calculations assume an inflation rate of 6 per cent. If wage increases are 10·9 per cent., which is what they should be if staff are not to take a cut in pay, the calculation of any growth is worthless. I do not see why low-paid health authority staff should have to bail out a Government who will not fund them properly. Health authorities are expected to find an additional £210 million from efficiency savings—a Government euphemism for cuts.

The Government's privatisation programme in the health service has been a complete disaster and led to dirtier hospitals, poorer food and, in many cases, a lousy laundry service, which any nurse will say is disgraceful. The forthcoming Labour Government will end the system of compulsory competitive tendering in such services as catering, laundry and domestic services.

As time is short, I shall refer to the second headline in the *Morning Star*. It states:

"London hospitals have cancelled leave for key staff and reserved emergency beds for possible war casualties from the Gulf crisis."

The Ministry of Defence initially denied that contingency plans for an emergency had been put into operation. However, today's edition of *The Guardian* carries a report that

"Britain's naval hospitals have more than doubled the amount of space set aside for mortuary preparations . . . The hospitals at . . . Plymouth and in Portsmouth, have each turned a medical ward into a mortuary to allow them together to deal with up to 100 bodies each day."

We have been told that if war breaks out in the Gulf a worst case scenario would be as many as 400 dead a day. Yesterday, the Secretary of State rejected any such suggestion. He said:

"Our determination would be to see casualty figures nothing like that figure at all."

If the Secretary of State for Defence believes that, before he plunges this country into war, he has a duty to tell us his estimate of the number of casualties. How many body bags does he anticipate will occupy the new mortuaries in Portsmouth and Plymouth? Where will the victims of a modern war be treated and what will happen to the hundreds of thousands of civilians currently on the growing waiting lists?

The world has no shortage of enemies. If the Prime Minister and the Government want to look for enemies, they can look at poverty, hunger and disease, and find plenty. They could have joined in with Opposition Members in opposing Saddam Hussein years ago when we said that we should not increase export credits to that man. The Government have used double standards on the Gulf. We did not go to war when the United States invaded Grenada or Panama, the Soviet Union went into Afghanistan, Indonesia annexed East Timor, or Israel claimed Jerusalem as its capital city and continued to occupy Gaza and the west bank. The hypocrisy of a Prime Minister who can mouth platitudes on the sanctity of international law and the necessity of war trials when she has slavishly followed United States policy in Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador and Cambodia, is frankly sickening. The stench of such hypocrisy brings shame to our country.

If the Prime Minister takes this country into what will be a devastating war, let her at least be honest about the reasons. Those include self-preservation and her hope for the Falklands factor—then, as now, she was in deep trouble at home, as is the President of the United States. Another of her reasons is to protect the oil companies' interests and the west's determination to get its hands on the oil.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Mahon: No, I shall not—I have only 10 minutes.

Everyone knows that this war is unnecessary and sanctions could be made to work. In *The Independent* today there is a letter from Staff Sergeant William Ghetti of the United States air force, which states:

"As each day passes, it is becoming more apparent that our primary mission is to protect the Saudi oil fields, with the restoration of Kuwait as a negotiable secondary concern. After all, we have not intervened in areas of less economic importance. The greed that drives our oil-based world economy has put us in the position that we are willing to risk our nation's sons and daughters in the quest for stable prices at the pumps."

I agree with that staff sergeant, who is now in the Gulf.

The banging of the war drum is totally irresponsible. Either before or after a war, people with the right credentials will have to sit down and negotiate. It would be much better if we sat down and negotiated before the war, before hundreds of thousands of people get killed. Governments have a responsibility to stop such disastrous events taking place——

Mr. Arnold: What about the Kuwaiti victims of murder, pillage and rape?

Mrs. Mahon: Conservative members who are heckling also have a responsibility, because they will not be returning in body bags or occupying mortuary wards in Plymouth or anywhere else, or adding to the queues in the national health service. I hope to God that the Government are not so desperate to be re-elected that they put their political survival before the lives of people in this country.

7.59 pm

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I have a warm welcome for the paragraph in the Queen's Speech which stresses the Government's determination to

"continue to work with our Community partners . . . and . . . contribute constructively to the inter-governmental conferences on Economic and Monetary Union and Community institutions",

because this country always has been and always will be part of Europe. More often than we should care to think about our involvement in Europe has been with arms and instruments of death. Now, thanks to the vision of a great Conservative Prime Minister of 50 years ago and to the political skills of some great European politicians, we have the finest chance ever to ensure that never again will our involvement in Europe be as an enemy of one European country or another.

That was part of the vision which swept us to power in 1979 and which gave us not only a majority of British Members of the European Parliament but a right-of-centre majority in that Parliament. It was that vision which impelled us into the Single European Act so that progress towards a more effective European Community could be accelerated. And it is that vision that we should be idiotic to renounce.

Yet suddenly we seem to falter. We fought a campaign in the last European elections which for the first time suggested that the Conservative party was in doubt about our future in Europe—and we paid the price. We lost our majority in Europe and we now have to live with the socialist consequences of that defeat.

It is worse than that, however. In the early years of this Government we had close relations with the Christian Democrat majority; now we do not. Then we could count most of the time on the support of many other countries; now we cannot. I believe that that is because of an uncharacteristic attack of pessimism at the highest levels.

I hate the continual repetition of the idea that we cannot compete with the Germans or the French. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister paid tribute to the Nissan factory the other day, she said:

"It is a combination of British workmanship and Japanese management which is producing excellent cars".—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 866.]

That struck a chill in my heart, for it is a recipe for a Third world economy if ever I heard one. We know that British management with British workers can take on and beat the world, and that is what we need to ensure in future.

I share the Government's determination to mould the European Community to a shape with which we can be comfortable, but we need to examine carefully how we do that. I do not believe that we can do it by putting forward excellent policies in a tone of voice that leaves us with no one else in our lobby. We cannot do it by attacking the European Commission either. It is the Council of Ministers which takes decisions, serviced by committees that meet in secret and are effectively accountable to no one.

I welcome the belated moves being made in this House to give us a better chance to advise Ministers before they go to a Council meeting and to scrutinise more easily the European Community's proposals, but I deeply regret the continuing failure to make effective the links between us and our Members of the European Parliament. We are the only EC member which treats our Members of the European Parliament as aliens from another planet. That is why I welcomed the calling of the assizes under my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell).

The Council of Ministers should be able to be called to account, and that must be by the European Parliament; and its committees should be open to scrutiny and called to account both by the European Parliament and by this House. Above all, we need the optimism to believe that Britain can compete and succeed in a wider Europe. We should have more British candidates coming forward for the European civil service, not fewer as is happening now. We should recognise the costs of being lukewarm about Europe and we should embrace with enthusiasm the opportunities that it can provide. We need to change our tactics to secure our objectives and we need to do so soon.

One of the problems about the European debate is the confusion about what is meant by sovereignty and citizenship. Lately, a report was published by a commission under the patronage of Mr. Speaker. Its topic was citizenship. It was a large commission—with hindsight, probably too large—and it set itself a difficult

[Mr. Andrew Rowe]

task: to see how citizenship might be redefined and encouraged. The commission discovered much that was vital to the country and to this debate.

We found that young people want to know much more about what it means to be a citizen. We found that judges, Members of Parliament, civil servants, teachers and many others often have little or no idea about the effects on citizenship of the many international agreements that we have signed since the war. The international charter on human rights, the United Nations charter on the rights of the child and many other charters have made significant changes to the status of British citizens. The report urges action to ensure that those changes are widely understood. That would reduce enormously the number of occasions on which we are taken to European courts, because we would know what we were talking about.

The commission also made a series of recommendations to make it possible for every British citizen, starting with the young, to contribute through voluntary work to the society in which he lives. One of the themes of this debate is alienation—the isolation of one person from another, or one group from another; the isolation that persuades thousands of young people that it does not matter if they prey on other members of society; or which encourages groups to dismiss or harass others because of the colour of their skin or their accent or religion. There is also the isolation of parents who seem so turned in on themselves that they can abuse their own children.

How can we change all this? It is not a matter of penalties or of prisons. They play a necessary part in the framework of society, but if we are to change things we have to break down the barriers between our citizens which have been erected by ignorance and prejudice. By far the best way to break them down is to give our citizens, especially the young, the chance to serve others so that they can see for themselves what other people are really like. That way they can build up their self-confidence in dealing with other people and we can show them how to work together in a team. Isolation, ignorance and fear breed anti-social behaviour, and becoming involved in what my right hon. and learned Friend's predecessor called active citizenship is good for the volunteer, good for the cause in which he or she works and good for society.

I urge my right hon. and learned Friend to take seriously Mr. Speaker's commission's plea that a national debate be begun on citizenship and on active citizenship. I should also like to hope that the other measures to be laid before us will include charity law reform. A satisfactory system of protecting an ever more generous public against the possibility of fraud is long overdue and could be brought forward in a Bill to reform charitable law.

I very much agree with hon. Members who have said that we need a much more open society. We have become increasingly nervous of opening up the documents on which we construct our debates to public scrutiny, and that is demeaning to the public and extremely bad for those who have to make policy. I hope that we can become much less paranoid about documents; if they were open to the public, there would be fewer leaks, and we could conduct public debates in a better way.

Finally, as the Member for Mid-Kent, I cannot leave the Queen's Speech in which so much money has been given to transport without mentioning the high-speed train. I was greatly encouraged by a distinguished article in *The Times* on Saturday by Professor Peter Hall in favour of the eastern approach to London. It is becoming increasingly clear that British Rail has totally misunderstood the arguments about freight and that Kent county council is beginning to understand the importance of those arguments. It is manifest that British Rail, even with the Government's present generosity, is highly unlikely to be able to make its existing proposal viable.

I am optimistic that, over the next two or three years, the penny will drop and that we shall find ourselves with a four-track railway capable of carrying continental freight by a method that will preserve not only the roads of Kent but those in the rest of the country from the vast inroads of heavy lorries. I look forward to the successful conclusion of a campaign that has occupied me and many of my colleagues for far too long.

8.10 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Before making the speech that I told the Home Secretary about in an intervention, I should like to refer to the speech by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux). The right hon. Gentleman spoke warmly about the election as President of the Irish Republic of Mary Robinson. Mary Robinson has made overtures to Northern Ireland and has said that she is willing to meet people from both communities and to extend the hand of friendship from the Republic to Northern Ireland. The right hon. Gentleman did not reject that hand. That is important for future developments in Ireland and offers the possibility of peace and progress in both parts of the island.

The theme of the debate is rights, freedoms and responsibilities and that, too, is relevant to Ireland. Healthy rights and freedoms and the widespread taking up by society of its collective responsibilities are characteristics of a full democracy. Underpinning a full democracy is a universal franchise. Such a franchise is no guarantee of democracy, because some of the civil liberties that we have been discussing, the attitudes of society and the right to formulate and to express opinion relevant to the discussion that we had on broadcasting are all very important. However, the starting point is that everyone should have a vote. That is why the Chartists fought so strongly for the vote in the 19th century. They achieved it for men and at the beginning of the 20th century the suffragettes achieved it for women.

We came to recognise that full franchise is a birthright and we had to overcome technical difficulties to ensure that everyone was on the electoral register. If we remove that we shall take away one of the major justifying principles for the rule of law. I am not saying that the rule of law should not operate if democracy is imperfect, but that it should be furthered as democracy itself is furthered. Specific sets of circumstances are liable to arise under which the laws passed in societies without a full franchise strongly impinge on minorities which are unable to do anything about it through the exercise of the franchise. In such cases their protests may not always be kept fully within the rule of law but become intemperate and unjust, as are the actions of terrorists in Northern Ireland.

In Britain there is a general belief that we have finally guaranteed electoral rights and that the latest full expression of it is codified in the Representation of the

People Act 1985. But that overlooks the impact of the operation of the poll tax, which in this context can be looked upon not just as a poll tax per head, but as having to do with electoral registration and voting. Because of the operation of the poll tax, more than 600,000 people in England, Scotland and Wales are currently missing from the electoral register. That becomes evident when we look at the number of 18-year-olds estimated to be in the population. Such a disparity did not occur before the introduction of poll tax. It does not occur in Northern Ireland which does not have the poll tax.

In the Finchley constituency over the past two years, 8·5 per cent. of people have disappeared from the electoral register. I shall later argue that the Finchley model is being furthered by the Home Office in circulars that it is sending out to electoral returning officers. In what could still be an election year, the Gracious Speech should have included a promise to restore a full franchise on which the rest of the rights and freedoms depend.

It was evident from the start that the poll tax would undermine electoral registration. The very notion of accountability talked about by the Government showed that there was a link between the poll tax and registering to vote, not merely making use of the right to vote. Electoral registration numbers first started to fall in Scotland when the poll tax was introduced there and they later began to fall in England and Wales. It is likely to be a serious factor when the figures for the current registration are published in the provisional registers which are due at the end of November.

The principle of the poll tax and electoral registration being linked is clear. When the poll tax register is short of the people who hide in desperation because they cannot pay, it will be topped up following an examination of the electoral register. The two matters are closely connected and in many cases solidly interlinked.

We are beginning to see not just the principle of that operation but some empirical evidence that my argument is correct. In legislation, such things will occasionally pop through, sometimes almost unnoticed by the House. In the previous Session, the House passed the Caldey Island Act 1990. It was discovered that some monks and other inhabitants of Caldey Island were not correctly enfranchised and not paying their poll tax. Section 1 enfranchises the residents of Caldey Island and section 2 makes them pay their poll tax. That seems to be a recognition that there is some similarity between the two problems that have arisen. It came out in that minor legislation which, however, was important for the citizens of Caldey Island.

Home Office circular RPA 347 of 10 August begins to show something of the connection between the electoral register and the poll tax register. The circular contains instructions from the Home Office to electoral returning officers and paragraph 25 states:

"Where a person whose name was on the previous electoral register does not respond to canvass, and his name does not appear on the community charges register, it is recommended that the name should not be carried forward."

In some cases, a person could be entitled to be on the electoral register and be on a poll tax register in a different constituency. An example is students who are resident elsewhere. If they have inadvertently left their names off the electoral register, they will disappear fairly quickly, because their names will not be on the poll tax register either.

On 23 October this year, the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) asked the Prime Minister:

"Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is now a case for turning the poll tax into exactly that—for taking the vote away from people who have not paid their community charge, and giving it back to them only when they have done so?" —[*Official Report*, 23 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 187.]

That astonishing remark was—even more astonishingly—supported by other hon. Members in an amendment to an early-day motion that I presented. They appear not to have appreciated the significance of what had been said: that people must pay a tax to be able to vote.

I am reminded of the recent election in Chile. To register on the electoral roll, people had to pay up to a month's salary on what resembled a British employment scheme. If such a tax were imposed in this country, we could find it obnoxious; having looked up our constitutional theory, we would argue strongly against it. Yet the poll tax provisions are very similar. Increasingly, those who are not on the poll tax register will not appear on the electoral register either.

Mrs. Mahon: I, too, was in the Chamber when the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Mr. Riddick) made his suggestion to the Prime Minister. My hon. Friend, like me, will have observed in the short time for which we have both been Members of Parliament that Back-Benchers often fly kites for the Prime Minister. Some months later, a Bill is presented that takes up the Back Bencher's suggestion, no matter how outrageous it may be.

Mr. Barnes: The significant feature of the kite flown by the hon. Member for Colne Valley was the fact that the Prime Minister did not promptly reject it, arguing—with a natural adherence to the democratic principles in which she is supposed to believe—that it flew in the face of the libertarian tenets that should lie at the core of a proud defence of the franchise; especially in a constituency such as Colne Valley, which has a tradition of liberal radicalism and democratic socialism.

The most important item of empirical evidence to support my argument is that which I cited earlier—the number of names that are missing from the electoral register. These things are difficult to judge, but one way of judging them is to compare the number of names on the register with the estimated number of people aged over 18. Until 1987, there was at least a rough and ready connection between the two, but after that the names start to disappear. It seems that some 1·5 per cent. of the electorate are missing from the current electoral register—at least 600,000 people.

It may be far worse than that, however. For some time, I have been trying to discover—by means of parliamentary questions—what is happening in Finchley, and whether the loss of 8·5 per cent. of the electorate is the end of the story. Have any more names disappeared? We may find out shortly. I shall signal a punch, so that the Prime Minister will not have a surprise on Thursday; when I ask my question, the state of the electoral register will not be far from my mind.

There are other blocks to electoral registration. For instance, the selling of the register for commercial purposes is considered as serious as any other factor, as is shown by the number of letters that I have received from people who read my recent letter to *The Times*. Some people do not want their names to appear on the register, fearing that they will be flooded with junk mail from

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various organisations. The only way in which they can escape the problem is by withholding their names from the register.

People should not do that, of course, and I urge everyone who writes to me to maintain the basic rights without which it will be impossible for them to change the position. If they want to get rid of the poll tax, they will need the franchise. Some are so desperate, however, that they dispense with those rights, because they know that the time when they can change the position is all too far ahead. We should be digging out the principles established by the Chartists and the suffragettes which justified the militant activities that they undertook—principles that fly in the face of the Home Secretary's suggestion that the rule of law is a neat line, over which no one must ever venture. If the principle of the electoral register is being undermined, surely different possibilities may present themselves.

We spend a miserly amount on encouraging enfranchisement, compared with what is spent on general Government publicity. In 1989, £320,000—0·31 per cent. of expenditure—went on encouraging people to take up their electoral rights, while Abbey National alone spent £6·5 million on encouraging people to vote in a plc election. It could not tell them which way to vote, of course, although what it wanted was obvious; nevertheless, it spent all that money encouraging them to use their enfranchisement rights within a single company. Similarly, we spend a fortune publicising the electricity privatisation. Where is the equivalent of "Frank N. Stein" and his cuddly monster to encourage people to take up the most basic right in a democratic society?

If it were purely random, the loss of franchise would have no impact on the outcome of elections. It would be serious enough for the right of individuals to have their say to be removed, but if, say, every 10th person happened to be missing from the register, the political consequences might not be too alarming, and matters could probably be put right afterwards. The people whose names are missing, however, are those who cannot pay the poll tax—people who are frightened of it, and who therefore have the strongest objection to its imposition. They would not vote Conservative if they had a vote. There are civil libertarians, bothered about the possibility of commercial organisations having access to their names and addresses. They cannot be seen sitting in solid ranks on the Conservative Benches. It is therefore to the Government's advantage to push through measures that result in a fiddling of the franchise.

Mrs. Wise: Is not the temptation for young people to opt out of the franchise particularly damaging? Is it not likely to lead to a lifetime of hostility, and a sense of alienation from the democratic process?

Mr. Barnes: According to the evidence that I have obtained from the Library, the loss of voting rights is most serious among "attainers"—those coming up to the age of 18. If people are missing from the electoral register, it is theoretically possible to refer to the previous register to find them, but attainers will not be on any previous register. The figures show that in England, Scotland and Wales the loss of names is far greater in that age group.

In Northern Ireland, which does not have the poll tax, more attainers than ever are now registered. The Northern Ireland franchise is highly efficient and democratic. Of course, the problem in Northern Ireland is that the population has nothing much on which to vote. They do not have the right major political parties about which to make a choice. They do not have a Bill of Rights and they do not have the right provisions to ensure that a democracy is properly run. But at least they are on the starting block, whereas in England, Scotland and Wales the starting block is being chopped from under the population.

I strongly opposed the extension of the vote to expatriates, some of whom left this country up to 20 years ago. Some of them were only babes in arms—yet they will have a vote that will give them a say in the running of this country. Those votes will be distributed to different areas under a system that will be wide open to abuse. Instructions have been sent to electoral returning officers by the Home Office. Luckily, despite all the efforts of "Conservatives Abroad" trying to persuade people to register, not many have yet done so. Nevertheless, the position must be closely monitored as potentially some 3 million people could be included on electoral registers under that system.

Parliament should wake up to that fraud. It is a "grab-what-you-can" attitude, with none of the usual principles of democracy. If Parliament accepts that, we can only appeal beyond the Chamber to the public to take action, be vigilant and put matters right. They must protest and pressurise about the decline in the franchise. When they have the opportunity to vote, even with a shrinking electorate, they must use that vote to change the system and restore the franchise. Conservative Members, whose Government have introduced these measures, have a special responsibility to examine their consciences. They were elected on a full franchise, and they should stand again on a full franchise.

The fact that, currently, only 1·5 to 2·5 per cent. are affected does not alter the position, because in the British electoral system that could have a significant impact on the results. Is it not true that the Prime Minister's main hope for holding on to Finchley is that the franchise has been shifted and fiddled so much that she might just be re-elected? It is disgraceful.

The long march to democracy, which we thought had gone much of the way, has now been halted and, in some ways, put into reverse. When I was elected in 1987, I did not dream that I would have to stand up in this Chamber, time and again, and press for one person, one vote. This is the first time that I have done so in the presence of the Home Secretary, but I have done it many times in the presence of his junior Ministers. There are those who believe in one person, one vote, one value, and they argue for proportional representation. Not many of them are here tonight—indeed, there is no one on the Liberal-Democrat Benches. If they believe in one person, one vote, one value, they should argue for a full return to the franchise. We cannot have one value if everybody does not have the right to exercise his vote.

The loss of 1·5 per cent. of the electorate is much more damaging under a first-past-the-post system than it would be under a proportional representation system. One reason why I am becoming more sympathetic to proportional representation is that the fiddling that could occur under that system would have less significance. However, I remain opposed to certain aspects of

proportional representation, such as the single transferable vote in a multi-member constituency. We must stand up for democracy. I hope that the Home Secretary listens carefully to what we say and responds to it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) referred to the Gulf crisis. I did not manage to speak in our previous debates on that matter, even though I have a great interest in what happens in Iraq. Some considerable time ago, between 1954 and 1956, I did my national service in Iraq. I worked with the Iraq state railway. I was stationed in Basra in the south of Iraq, an area which has been prominent in the moves against Kuwait. Certain aspects of Iraq today are similar to those prevalent in 1954 to 1956. I wish to relate two incidents that had a major impact on my political opinions and views on the current position in the Gulf.

Shortly after arriving in Iraq, I was moved by train from my camp at Habbaniyah to Basra. I travelled on the old Berlin to Baghdad railway, which had been extended to Basra. The train travelled slowly, and on the outskirts of Baghdad I saw the mud huts, the mud streets, the open sewers, the flies and the general deprivation. It was quite a shock to an 18-year-old; the reality is far different from the pictures one sees on television. It appeared to be mediaeval and biblical.

After a bloody coup in Iraq involving the then President Kassem and the death of King Faisal, there was an improvement in the suburbs. Brick houses were built and electricity and proper sewers were installed. Despite all the problems with Kassem's regime, he at least did something about providing housing for the working class and the peasantry of Iraq. I understand that fresh suburbs with mud huts and all that goes with them have now re-emerged around Baghdad because Saddam Hussein has used his financial resources only to extend his military hardware and to develop his empire. The Iraqi people and the people of the middle east generally, with the exception of the favoured few, need decent social provisions and the democracy that should go with it.

I left Iraq in the middle of the Suez crisis. I wondered whether I would be drawn into it. I remember listening to the BBC overseas network on the camp radio. It said that there were no British troops in Iraq, only a handful of military advisers. In fact, there were 3,000 troops as well as some modern aeroplanes. Obviously, there was a danger that we would be drawn into the Suez conflict. That conflict involved collusion between the United Kingdom, France and Israel and showed me the incorrectness of our imperialist interference in that area. During King Faisal's period, Crown territory at Shaiber, Habbaniyah and Basra was returned to the Iraqi Government. It appeared that we were finally pulling out.

However, we are now fully involved. The lessons from those two experiences are that it would be disastrous if American, British and French troops were to move into Kuwait, even if it were a quick strike like the six-day war by the Israelis and there were a quick military victory. The consequences would be horrendous for the middle east. Governments would collapse left, right and centre. The Jordanian Government would fall into the arms of Saddam Hussein, war would break out with Israel and the middle east would be open to more undemocratic forces, as the Muslim brotherhood and others would bound forth.

We must seek to stop that. If action is to be taken in the middle east, it must be with the agreement of the international community and under United Nations control. I recognise that the presence of troops can aid the process of economic sanctions, but they can have the terrible consequence of leading to bloody conflict.

Mrs. Mahon: Like my hon. Friend, I wanted to speak in the two-day debate on the Gulf, but was excluded, it would seem, purely on the basis that I am female. Does my hon. Friend accept that people who are closely connected with the hostages and those who have returned also want negotiations and some settlement without armed conflict? All those who have returned, almost to a person, have said that they very much regretted the Prime Minister's warlike rhetoric.

Mr. Barnes: Public opinion is changing. Minds are being concentrated on the possibility of our troops dying. The hostages have been used outrageously by Saddam Hussein. His regime is evil and many of the other things that are said about it are correct, although if it fell in the circumstances that I have described, a decent, new democratic regime may not blossom forth.

We need more debate and discussion on the issue. I am sorry that hon. Members have not had an opportunity, apart from the two-day debate, to discuss this fully and thoroughly, but instead have had to pinch time out of a debate about freedoms and democracy. As many hon. Members as possible should use the Chamber to express their views on the major issue of the hour, and I hope that we shall get some response.

8.43 pm

Mr. David Amess (Basildon): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department on the robust fashion in which he articulated the rights, freedoms and responsibilities that Conservative Members believe in.

The subject that we are discussing is at the core of the differences between both sides of the Chamber. The Opposition have a different view from Conservative Members on the relationship between the state and the individual. I warmly welcome all the proposals in the Queen's Speech, including the War Crimes Bill.

Several Opposition Members felt that they had to refer to the leader of our party. On Wednesday, the Leader of the Opposition made what I thought would be a major speech. For five minutes he held the House, but for the rest of the time he was absolutely atrocious, resorting to personal abuse of Conservative Members and giving absolutely no detail about policy. This time last year, I said that the Opposition could not get away for another year without articulating their policies. I admit that I was completely wrong. Whatever the issue, the Opposition's answer is to spend more money. How they will create the wealth to sustain the extra spending, we are yet to hear.

Labour Members had the cheek to speak of inflation and interest rates. When they shared Government with the Liberal party, they were not concerned about interest rates or the rate of inflation, but now they have the cheek to lecture us.

Labour has tabled three amendments to the Address. The first deals with education. Where was Labour's support for freedom and choice in education when Shirley Williams was Secretary of State? I certainly do not recall it.

The second amendment deals with Europe. The Labour party has the cheek to lecture Conservative Members

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about Europe. In 1962, it was in favour of Europe, but in 1964 it opposed it. In 1966, it was in favour of Europe, but in 1971 it opposed it. In 1975, it was in favour of Europe, but in 1983 it opposed it. Surprise, surprise, in 1990 it is in favour of Europe. A cynic would say that it cuts its cloth to suit the way in which it believes people are thinking. I am a cynic, and I believe that it is just talking on Europe because it thinks that there will be short-term political gain in doing so. The Government legislate not according to short-term popularity but according to what we think is in the long-term interests of Britain. I believe that the nation will continue to support us in our endeavours.

This has been a good few weeks for the constituency of Basildon. First, I was delighted that the Secretary of State for the Environment and the Minister for Housing and Planning announced that the pilot scheme for changing rents into mortgages would be held in Basildon. The scheme will give many constituents the opportunity to fulfil their lifetime ambition of owning their home. Again, we see the duplicity of the Opposition on home ownership. Labour and Liberals voted against every word and line of the legislation on home ownership. When in 1979 and 1983 they realised that it was popular, they changed their mind. As interest rates have increased, they do not think that home ownership is such a good thing. We are consistent because we believe in home ownership.

Secondly, Basildon has the first grant-maintained school in Essex, Chalvedon school. That is giving parents an opportunity to take full advantage of the direct funding of the Government. Thirdly, the local Labour party set up area management committees, which are supposed to listen to the views of the people and act accordingly. On their agenda was the proposed development of a Tesco superstore. More than 200 people turned up at the meeting; 197 were against the proposal and three were for it. What did the democratic Labour party do? It approved the plan for a Tesco superstore in Basildon. I am delighted that this democratic Government, through my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, has decided to call in the plan.

Fourthly, we were delighted with the local government finance statement. Last year, Basildon district council was 196 per cent. above the standard spending assessment—twice as much as any other local authority. The council now tells us that it has the finance to pay only the interest charges on the debt that it has accumulated and that it can meet the cost only of administering the community charge. I fully support the community charge. It is reprehensible that any hon. Member should decide not to pay it.

Fifthly, we have the "I love Basildon" campaign, which has not cost the charge payer any money. It is about telling the good residents of Basildon that we have created a fine town and that we wish it to remain litter-free, graffiti-free and vandal-free. I am delighted that, last week, the Princess of Wales came to Basildon to open part of St. Luke's hospice. Within six years, local residents have raised more than £800,000 through jumble sales and tombolas. The Princess of Wales brought joy to many of my constituents. At the end of her visit, she launched the "I Love Basildon" song, which is about our town. We invited local residents to compose the tune and perform it. It is performed by the guides and the profits from the record will go towards St. Luke's hospice. We were delighted that the Princess of Wales launched the song, and I very much hope that it will become a No. 1 hit.

In deference to my three colleagues who are waiting to speak, I shall move on quickly. I warmly welcome all the proposals in the Gracious Speech, but especially that concerning parental responsibility. It is sad that 15 is the peak age of offending. Many of the children have parents who are in difficulty. I fully understand that and recognise why the behaviour of those children is not exactly as we should wish it to be, but I cannot accept that every delinquent child comes from a broken home.

All of us as Members of Parliament have people who attend our surgeries—often they are elderly people—complaining about disturbances outside their flats or houses caused by young people. All those children have parents. It is not good enough to send one's children out to play outside other people's homes. With no cost to the charge payer or the ratepayer, every Member of Parliament is beholden, on a bipartisan basis, to encourage more parental responsibility.

I welcome the proposals, especially those dealing with children between 10 and 15, in the Criminal Justice Bill. I welcome the proposals that will require courts to order parents to attend court unless it is unreasonable to do so. When young people are convicted of a criminal offence and the courts decide to impose a fine or make an order for compensation of costs, the courts must order the young people's parents to pay, unless it would be unreasonable to do so. I welcome the proposals in the Bill to strengthen the impact of that order. The Bill will make it beyond doubt that, in deciding upon the level of payments to be made, courts must take account of the parents' means and not just the means of their children. It will make it clear that, in assessing the amount of compensation or a fine, the courts will not be bound by the juvenile's means.

I welcome the extension of community service orders to cover 16 and 17-year-olds. I congratulate the Home Office team on deciding that it will no longer be necessary to keep the sentence of detention in a young offenders' institution for girls under 18. That sensible package will be applauded throughout the country.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) mentioned a constituent, Terry Marsh. He lives in Basildon and my remarks are certainly not made at his behest. He welcomes the fact that British justice has now seen that he has been cleared. But Terry Marsh was in detention for 10 months, which is a long period, and several people have asked how that case came to court on the basis of the evidence provided. I applaud all the local police in Basildon. When I became a Member eight years ago, there was one police station. There are now three—in Pitsea, Laindon and Basildon—and they are doing a magnificent job. In three weeks' time, the Lord Chancellor will come to Basildon to open a new magistrates court. If all Members of Parliament, regardless of their political party, supported the work of our police force, crime prevention and detection would be much more effective.

Our rights, freedoms and responsibilities will always be preserved by the Conservative party and the Conservative Government, but from what I have heard in the debate, they will certainly not be preserved by the Labour party. On Europe, the Conservative party is on the side of the

angels. Eastern bloc countries, which we would welcome to the EC, have rejected socialism. I believe that the British people will continue to do likewise.

8.56 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this debate. I shall try to be brief so that my two hon. Friends who wish to participate have time to speak. I would say to the hon. Member for Derbyshire, North-East (Mr. Barnes) that in this debate on rights, freedoms and responsibilities, many of us would regard it as among our first responsibilities as Members of Parliament to ensure that we pay our taxes. Whatever side we are on—whether as Labour Members who disagree with the community charge or as Conservative Members who disagreed with the high rates of taxation suffered by the whole country under a Labour Government—we, above all people, should pay our taxes.

Mr. Harry Barnes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: I am afraid that I shall not give way because the hon. Gentleman had half an hour on this subject, which is more time than is available for three of us on the Conservative Benches. No doubt we shall hear many more half-hours of speeches from him on this subject.

I should like to support two measures promised in the Gracious Speech that should strengthen the sense of individual responsibility throughout the country—one is the Criminal Justice Bill and the other is the road traffic legislation, which I know is not within the direct responsibility of my hon. Friend the Minister, but I shall refer to some aspects that relate to Home Office matters. Those matters were debated on Friday.

I warmly support those Bills, but I wish to draw attention to the difficulties that we face in ensuring that certain groups of young people live up to the responsibilities that the law places on them, and to point out that, although the measures proposed will help to combat the problems of under-age drinking and driving and the general incidence of teenage crime, still more action may need to be taken in future.

The road traffic Bill includes some welcome provisions. We have probably all been visited in our surgeries by the relatives of people who have been killed by drunken drivers—drivers who have subsequently received what seemed to be derisory fines and penalties. A prison sentence of up to five years is an appropriate penalty and I hope that it will be used to the full by the courts. There is a case for considering still longer periods for which to withdraw a person's driving licence, and the provision for a new test to be taken before a licence is reissued is an excellent idea.

I suspect that the considerable problem of under-age drinking when driving will remain. That is because in many licensed premises it is fairly easy for people under the age of 18 to obtain alcohol, just as it is easy for those under the age of 16 to obtain cigarettes elsewhere. It may seem churlish to criticise those involved, but when the wide availability of alcohol is combined with a recently passed driving test, the consequences can be terrible.

I raise the subject for a constituency reason. My constituents in Wensleydale in north Yorkshire have recently been shocked by a series of road accidents associated with under-age drinking and driving in which 16 and 17-year-olds have suffered horrific injuries. For a while, victims' friends and local communities may reflect on those matters and act more carefully, but after a few months, all is forgotten and the same thing is likely to happen again. There is a particular problem in rural areas, where alternative forms of entertainment are sparse, where policy resources are stretched and where roads are unlit and dangerous in winter.

I should be the first to accept that it is not easy for us in the House to protect people from the consequences of their own actions, but I think that we can do more to help in the future. The measures announced in the Gracious Speech will help by making far more serious the personal consequences of drink-driving, but we also need a stronger effort in many schools and, possibly by Government Departments, to combat under-age drinking and driving. Over the years, campaigns on smoking, drugs and AIDS have succeeded in making an impact on people in their late teens. It may be time to give more attention in public health campaigns to alcohol and, in particular, to its connection with road accidents involving young people.

Some of my constituents, including many pub landlords, believe that the answer to the problem lies in some form of identity card. The landlords argue that they frequently serve alcohol to 16 and 17-year-olds because many of them look 18 and because they have no means of knowing for sure how old they are. I suspect that there will be many years of debate in the House before any decision is made to introduce national identity cards, but the potential for helping with under-age drinking is definitely one argument in favour.

The other measure in the Gracious Speech that should lead to an improved sense of responsibility is the Criminal Justice Bill, although I have some reservations about the progress that we are likely to make in reducing crime among the teenage population. There is no doubt that many of the provisions of the Bill will help. They include the doubling of the number of hours of community service that may be imposed on 16-year-olds and the general use of community service orders—for many young offenders an option far superior to prison, which clearly does not do many people a great deal of good and does not turn them away from crime.

Curfew orders, fines more related to the ability to pay and the increased power of courts to hold parents responsible for the actions of their children are undoubtedly good ideas, as is the attempt to ensure that prison sentences are for the most serious crimes while other measures, such as fines and community service orders, are deployed against more petty offenders.

I am not sure, however, that those measures will be sufficient in the long term to cope with a small class of persistent offenders in the teenage population who, in recent years, have blackened the reputation of their generation and undermined public confidence in the ability of the police to ensure that law and order are maintained.

My constituents and others in the north of England, including police officers, tell me that, in some areas, more than half the crimes are committed by people under the age of 17 and that those in that age group are particularly heavily involved in the theft of cars. In one area, I have heard about gangs of an average age of 16 who go out to steal cars each evening. Having stolen a car—usually of the more sporty, high-powered variety—they don ski masks and cruise past the police station blowing the horn and inviting pursuit. We are being naively optimistic if we

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think that restraint will necessarily be imposed by parents. I am told that, in that same area, parents of children under the age of 17 send their children to break the windows or steal the car tyres of people against whom they hold a grudge. Perhaps the provisions off the Criminal Justice Bill will help to deal with that.

There is a danger that a sort of professional criminal class will develop among the teenage population. I accept that custody is not necessarily the answer to that either. In many instances, young people can immediately produce a business card with the details of their solicitor when caught. Public confidence in the rule of law is reduced because of the difficulties that the police have in catching people who commit those perhaps petty but often repeated crimes. The real danger to public confidence sometimes arises when such persistent offenders are caught.

As one of my constituents wrote to ask me, what are we to do when persistent young offenders who are known to be such in their areas are not remanded or ever taken into custody even after many warnings and fines that are then followed by more offences? I absolutely agreed with my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison). He drew attention to the continuing role for deterrence. We sometimes forget about that. One of my constituents wanted to know what is to be done when a young offender is to appear in court, and knowing that he has nothing to lose because new offences committed since the notice of the intended prosecution will be ignored, embarks on a so-called crime spree. My hon. Friend the Minister may tell me that such things do not happen very often. However, many people believe that they do happen and that belief alone damages confidence in the courts and in the police.

While I congratulate the Home Office on its proposals, how confident are my colleagues in the Home Office that their planned changes will not make it even easier for young offenders to seem to get off lightly even after a long string of offences? The penalties imposed in those cases must be seen to bite. We must ensure that community service orders are sufficiently long, curfew orders sufficiently strict and parental fines sufficiently heavy to make an impact on that group of young people. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to assure us that the effect of the combination of those measures will be monitored and carefully researched and that the Government will be ready to tighten the measures further if the need arises in future.

9.5 pm

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Perhaps I can assist the hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) in his researchers. He might care to visit Massachusetts and consider the experiment carried out there many years ago which reduced juvenile crime and recidivism greatly simply by acknowledging that some juveniles are delinquent and that they should be taken out of the system at a very early age and then rehabilitated back into the system. However, that requires money and investment.

The new Criminal Justice Bill lacks any provision to deal with a growing scandal about which I have spoken to the Minister privately—the young people who kill themselves in our prisons. Inquests are held week in and week out. Prison suicides are increasing. We must ask ourselves why that is happening.

The press releases issued after the Queen's Speech announced with pride that the prison building programme was to have three of its proposed sites chopped out—one at Fazakerley, one in mid-Staffordshire and one elsewhere. It was stated that there would be enough room within the present prison system. We have the most disgraceful prisons in Europe. The conditions are appalling; people kill themselves there. But nothing is being done about it.

There is only one way to deal with the Armleys of this world, and that is to bulldoze them. If we are to have prisons, they should be used intelligently and, for goodness sake, they should be made hygienic. At least then we might begin to rehabilitate people instead of turning them from petty criminals into potentially professional villains who can only harm society.

If a little common sense is used and we invest in ascertaining the potential delinquents at an early age and try to rehabilitate them, and if we then find that there are people whom we must send to prison—I am not soft on crime and punishment—at least we will send them into humane conditions and we might rehabilitate them. We might at least put them somewhere where they can learn a trade or become educated and are not locked up 23 hours a day idling the hours away, spending their time talking to a cellmate and learning how to do the job better next time.

We delude ourselves by playing the endless turne of making sentences longer and then trying a new kind of punishment such as keeping people contained in their houses. That is a load of garbage. We already know that the tagging system cannot work. The tags go off as a result of interference from all kinds of external sources.

There is just one thing missing from the Queen's Speech. What do the Government intend to do to recreate a manufacturing base in this country? They will not encourage industry with high interest rates. They might have fallen a point and they might fall a couple of points more as we approach election day, but what are the Government going to do? What will they do to encourage inward investment instead of allowing capital to flow out like water through a sieve, as has happened for the past 12 years?

Perhaps the Minister of State might indulge me with the answer to one question that has baffled me for the past two months since I read it in a Dublin newspaper. How is it that the Republic of Eire, without vast oil resources or the hundreds of billions of pounds that we have had to throw away in the past 10 years, with an agriculture-based economy, with a migrant work force, and with no industrial base and skills, can arrive in October this year at an inflation rate of 2·8 per cent. while we, with all that oil money, landed up with an inflation rate of 10·7 per cent.? Could it have helped our economy not to have had the oil and, for once, to have learnt something from the Irish?

9.9 pm

Mr. David Nicholson (Taunton): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary, the police and all those involved in the arrests and the discoveries in north-west London earlier today. It is the breakthrough for which we have been waiting for several months. We are delighted, and we hope that it leads to convictions.

There are many Bills in the Gracious Speech that I would welcome, but first I single out two rather complex Bills for which we have been waiting for some time: first, to revise the planning system and, secondly, to improve the assessment, collection and enforcement of maintenance payments—very much the theme of this debate. Two nuggets that I also welcome are the provision of a second Severn crossing in the south-west, which will help my constituents and industry near my constituency, and, at long last, the implementation of the Horne report to reform procedures for street works so as to ensure that utilities dig up the roads in a consistent and co-ordinated way.

With regard to crime and related matters, I welcome the Criminal Justice Bill. I also welcome a piece of legislation for which I believe the Department of Transport is responsible, to toughen the penalty system for drink drivers who kill. In my constituency much concern was caused by the tragic death of a teenager, Joanne Cruwys, and the rather paltry sentence that was meted out to the man who, while very drunk, killed her. That matter was referred, under legislation that the House passed some years ago, by my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney General to the Court of Appeal. As a newspaper article stated last week, the gaol term and the ban from driving were extended. I welcome that and I look forward to legislation to ensure that we do not have to go through such a palaver and that parents and families do not have to go through the agony of seeing such matters prolonged.

As we implement what is contained in this commendable Queen's Speech we shall also be preparing our programme for the next Parliament. This Parliament has seen legislative revolutions in many aspects of our national life. Some of the measures that we have passed still await full implementation—for example, electricity privatisation and national health service reform. The jury on those matters is still out.

My constituents, like many others in the west country, are suspicious of drastic, rapid and frequent changes. They are not always carried along by rhetoric. They want to now thke bottom line—"How much will it cost me?" That is a good Tory response to any legislation, and thousands of my constituents are good old-fashioned Tories, although they are not entirely happy at present. For example, they require more persuasion on the issue of NHS trusts. I note from the local press that my hon. Friend the Member for Devon, North (Mr. Speller) agrees with my caution on that subject.

Similarly, my constituents have been slower than people elsewhere to introduce grant-maintained schools. I am not against grant-maintained schools, but we need to proceed with caution, certainly in my area. I therefore welcome the assurances, as reported in the press this morning, by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science on education vouchers.

The watchword for the next Parliament and for my party must be steady progress and improvements in public services, standards, quality, value for money and equity, and more caution towards administrative and structural upheaval—in other words, positive and constructive consolidation. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends will bear those words of caution in mind if they are called upon in the next few weeks, with whatever attendant reluctance or risk, to use their own rights, freedoms and responsibilities.

9.14 pm

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): In the brief time available to me, I should like to express my support for the War Crimes Bill because British justice and British honour are involved. We have unwittingly provided sanctuary to the people accused of terrible crimes. Now that that is known, we cannot leave it there. These crimes were crimes then. We are asking that those people be subject to the Director of Public Prosecutions and the courts of this land like any other British residents. That is all that is being asked of the House and Parliament. I hope that this time we shall see the legislation through on to the statute book.

We have heard much in recent days about an impending Labour Government, and many people outside wonder what such a Government would be about. But why study the crystal ball when you can read the book? The Labour party is in power in town and county halls throughout the country. Its track record is open to study in Liverpool, Brent and Ealing, where it was chucked out by its enraged charge payers last May, and in Haringey, Lambeth and Greenwich.

With records like that, in supposedly reformed moderate Labour councils, no wonder the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) has been so energetically laying down a smoke screen in recent days. We should blow away that smoke screen and look at some facts and figures.

First, Labour claims that there is no difference between the amount of community charge levied in Conservative and in Labour-controlled councils. In a press release from the Labour party on 18 April, we were told that the average poll tax in Conservative and Labour councils hardly differed. Let us look at those facts. Hon. Members need only go to the Library to get the facts for the average community charge for areas that are either Conservative unitary authorities, London or metropolitan boroughs, or which are under Conservative shire county and district councils. There are 95 such authorities, and the community charge in them averages £333. In the Labour-controlled areas—sadly, there are 73—local people suffer an average community charge of £384——

Mr. John Evans (St. Helens, North): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the poll tax is a fair tax?

Mr. Arnold: Well, £51 may not be a lot of money to the hon. Gentleman who yelled out, but it is certainly a lot of money to most of the people who have to pay it.

Mr. Evans: The hon. Gentleman voted for it.

Mr. Arnold: Well, those figures mask the reality. We forget the impact of the safety net all too easily. That is the system whereby residents of prudent Conservative authorities are obliged to subsidise the residents of wasteful Labour authorities. If we were to strip away the surcharges and handouts, we would find that the Labour party's arithmetical inexactitude is almost a case for reference to the Advertising Standards Authority. Having done that, we find that totally Conservative areas have an average community charge of £305, compared with the rip-off in totally Labour areas of £412—*[Laughter.]* Opposition Members may think that this is a laughing matter, but a differential of no less than £107 per head for the privilege of voting Labour has a devilish impact on the charge payers of those areas.

[Mr. Arnold]

Let us look at those rip-offs. Were it not for the generosity of the Government's safety net, people in the London borough of Greenwich would be paying £620. As it is, the rest of us are subsidising Greenwich residents to the tune of £212 per head—just because Greenwich has a traditionally wasteful Labour council. Lambeth's real rip-off is £575, not the £548 that it has tried to levy on local people. Haringey's is £573. Southwark would have to charge £550 were it not for our subsidy of £160. I could go on and on. I represent the people of Gravesham and I resent the fact that each of my constituents has had to pay £15 towards those spendthrift Labour councils.

One could call those figures a competence test and Labour councils would be found wanting. But how about the incompetence test? That is best measured by the level of contributions in the collection account. This year, inevitably, an estimate has had to be made, but next year the figures will be based on the actual record. That track record is already becoming evident. By August, in Conservative collecting authorities 83 per cent. of people had paid. In Labour authorities the figure was only 74 per cent. By the end of October the figures had become even clearer. In a study by *The Guardian*, the worst four collectors were all Labour controlled. In Hackney, 44 per cent. have paid nothing. In Liverpool, 42 per cent. of charge payers have paid nothing. In Lambeth, the figure is 40 per cent. Indeed, Lambeth has still not collected the rates from the previous system and has not closed its accounts since 1984-85. In Nottingham, 30 per cent. have not paid. That is not particularly surprising as Labour councillors, and indeed Labour Members of Parliament, give little encouragement to pay and put strongly the counter-arguments to paying the community charge. Thirty hon. Members backed the campaign of non-payment, as did many dozens, if not hundreds, of Labour councillors around the country.

In Gravesham, the leading Labour councillor, Tina Deadman, is leading a non-payment campaign. She is prepared to use council services but leaves it to other, less well-off people in the borough to pick up the bill. I thought that the Labour party was moderate and sanitised in this day and age. It is high time that it expelled Councillor Deadman and her like for her defiance of the law and lack of consideration for poorer constituents.

Fortunately, the overwhelming majority of councils have got on with collection. The figures now show that over 90 per cent. of people are paying. That is not dissimilar to the proportion who previously paid the rates. Some effective Conservative authorities are doing far better. Medina, which is a newly Conservative-controlled council on the Isle of Wight, has already collected from 96 per cent. of its charge payers. Gravesham has collected 93 per cent.

I could go through a litany of Conservative councils which are getting on with collection. Those figures will be reflected in the contributions next year to the collection account and chickens will come home well and truly to roost. Labour councils which have been least efficient or unco-operative in collecting their community charge will pass on that charge to their charge payers, who will know what to think.

One of the claimed virtues of the community charge was that the actual charge would be comprehensible to the electorate—an actual poundage figure. It would reveal the comparative performance of councils. That is now happening and there is no wonder at the frenetic activity of Labour Members.

9.22 pm

Ms. Jo Richardson (Barking): I do not know what the Home Secretary was worried about when he opened the debate this afternoon. He castigated us for choosing yet again—I admit it—the title of the debate. He was wrong to do so, because the House needs the opportunity that we provided by selecting this range of subjects to consider matters which may or may not be in the Queen's Speech but which some hon. Members wish had been included. Hon. Members needed an opportunity to give their views on rights, responsibilities and freedoms and show the House what they meant by them. Indeed, we heard some contrasting speeches from hon. Members on both sides of the House.

Our discussions ranged from mid-Kent and transport there, to Iraq and the national health service. My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) referred to the speech that she gave two years ago as an alternative Queen's Speech for women. It has all been interesting and enthusiastic stuff, which the Home Secretary should welcome.

The Tories have a negative concept of the term "freedom", which is presumably why they do not want to talk about it. They believe that, if the state does nothing to help and support people, somehow that increases each individual's freedom of movement. They emphasise individual responsibility, but fail to emphasise the individual's rights. That concept is a complete mystery to those of our constituents who are, for example, waiting for hip operations. It is no freedom for them to have to hang about for two or three years because the health service is not sufficiently responsive to provide a bed.

We in the Labour party have a positive concept of freedom. It emphasises individual choice and accepts that the Government have a role in providing the means which allow people to exercise that choice. It is nonsense to say that women with children are free to choose their work, if there is no child care available. That notion of choice is an empty piece of rhetoric.

One important aspect of this Session's legislation which epitomises those differences is presented in the White Paper "Children Come First". It places a strong emphasis on a father's responsibility to support his children financially. Although the Government have had many opportunities to do so, they do not recognise any corresponding rights which fathers could be accorded to encourage them to care for their children.

Why, for example, have the Government so consistently blocked the EC directive on parental rights which would open up opportunities for fathers to take leave from work to care for their children in the early stages of life? It is a good right, which would elicit a greater sense of responsibility from fathers. Instead, fathers are constantly labelled and stigmatised as merely breadwinners.

I support the idea of fathers paying maintenance for their children. I am sure that we have all had many letters from women constituents who want to know where their husbands are and will welcome this provision. I am sure that everyone will. However, I do not endorse the idea that fathers should be viewed solely as breadwinners. They

have or should have responsibilities for caring, too. How much more warmly I could have welcomed these proposals, if they had included a father's right to paternity leave on the birth of child, as the Labour party proposes.

When the Secretary of State for Social Security made his statement to the House he said:

"the welfare of children is the prime consideration."—[*Official Report*, 29 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 729.]

Yet the most important factor undermining the welfare of children in a separated or divorced family is the poverty of the mother and children living on benefit. We must look carefully at the concept of maintenance to ensure that we are not confirming women in that position.

It is hard to come to terms with the idea that there must be parental responsibility for a child's actions, but I understand what the Secretary of State is saying. Yet what is the position of a mother who has been left by her husband or who has left her husband and has the double responsibility of being both parents and of following her children to court to see that they are all right? We must consider that double responsibility.

Central to the Tory notion of freedom is the free market, yet in so many areas of life that market fails to provide. It does not deliver training, child care or employment rights. It is that same free market morality that has helped to turn Britain into a bitterly divided nation. This is the first post-war Government to have turned the morality of Robin Hood on its head as they rob the poor to give to the rich.

Another important area of rights are those that a woman should have when she is expecting a baby. My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) talked about the national health service, based on her expertise. Women have a right to expect good quality pre-natal and post-natal care and they should not have to worry about losing their jobs. They should also not have to worry about finding a hospital bed when the time comes to have the baby, but that is happening in my health authority.

Maternity rights should be available for all working women—the basic provision in every Community country. The extension of maternity rights to all working women would be a practical and equitable measure that would deliver real equal opportunities and social justice to many more women. I hope that the Government will support the proposed European directive that will guarantee women those rights. Sadly, nothing in the Government's track record gives me much cause for hope.

The Government claim to have improved life for women, but let us look at the record on independent taxation. The introduction of independent taxation was much vaunted and women thought that they would at last have independence in taxation, with the ability to fill in their own forms. Women should, of course, have the right to be taxed independently and equally, but the Government have a responsibility to ensure that that happens. Independent taxation has not meant equal taxation. A married couple might earn exactly the same amount of money, but the woman still pays more tax. In all but exceptional circumstances, the married couple's tax allowance goes to the husband, which hardly represents a major advance for women.

The Conservative party's much vaunted ministerial group on women's issues has been a loud-mouthed, do-nothing group, which has failed to advance women's rights one iota. The five-point plan on child care has not led to the creation of even one more nursery place. That group is nothing more than a cynical piece of self-promotion and a sorry substitute for real action. The plain fact is that the United Kingdom is still at the bottom of the league in the provision of child care.

The appointment of a woman Minister to be chair—I know that she does not like to be called chairman—of the ministerial group will do no more to advance women's rights than the sorry track record of the Conservative woman Prime Minister. In last year's debate, the then chair of that group—still a member of it, as I understand it—claimed that he had improved opportunities for women in public life. I suggest that he should have started by putting his own house in order, because 96 per cent. of the cleaners employed by the Home Office are women, but only 2 per cent. of the professional and technical officers. That is something of a contrast. I hope that the Minister, now she has taken up her abode at the Home Office, will look to that. There were considerable opportunities for the ministerial group to implement some equal opportunity strategies—I hope that they will take those opportunities now.

I recently conducted an exercise on the visibility of women in the top ranks of the police throughout England and Wales. I hope that the hon. Lady will look at it—it is a sorry picture. It is shame that there are not more chief officers, superintendents, assistant superintendents and deputies, and that women are to be found only as constables and up to the level of sergeant. Women can have little confidence in the police when they see little reflection of themselves in the force.

Today, I attended an interesting conference across the road in the Queen Elizabeth suite, organised by the National Federation of Women's Institutes, which is not exactly a Labour organisation. Its members call it the sleeping giant. There were 800 women at the conference, and I wish all the hon. Members present had been there to hear them, because they had plenty to say about their position in society and the rights of which they fear they are deprived. They began to ask the panel what would happen when the sleeping giant woke up and made a few waves. I wanted to bring them all over here to make a few waves this evening, so that male Conservative Members could hear what those women were saying.

I brought the women to their feet when I said that the Lord Chancellor had recently stated that he hoped that there would be more blacks and women as judges, not this year, next year or the 1990s, but the next century. The women wanted to know why their talents and aspirations were so hidden and barrier-ridden that they had to wait until many of the subjects that the women's institutes had been discussing over the years are properly aired in the courts, and taken notice of and there are more women judges to help in that.

The general thrust of this debate has been about rights. We are interested and concerned to hear what the Minister has to say in response. I have made a short summing-up speech because there have been so many speakers this evening. The Conservative vision of rights, responsibilities and freedoms is certainly not the same as the Labour one. We have a vision that is coming across to people in this country, who know that it can become a reality, but they know, and they cannot wait for it, that that reality will come only with a Labour Government.

9.38 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): It is a pleasure for me to be here this evening to answer this interesting, wide-ranging debate in which there have been 19 speeches from Back-Benchers ranging across a series of issues, including the environment, health, education, the family, the citizen, urban life and the wider concerns of Europe and even the Gulf. All those have been within the context of this evening's topic—rights, freedoms and responsibilities. I shall do my best to respond to the points that have been made, but I hope that the House will be as indulgent as it usually is if I miss some of them.

The right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) gave me some comfort for some of the time during some of his speech. He will not be surprised to learn that I was less happy with some of his other sentiments. The right hon. Gentleman said that crime prevention was the focal point of the policies of his party, and he dismissed the record of the Government, so I shall reiterate a little of what we have done in this area.

Crime prevention is and will continue to be an essential element in our response to crime. In recent years there have been substantial gains in this area, locally and nationally. The growth of neighbourhood watch schemes, driven by the desire of members of the public to tackle crime, has been phenomenal. There are now more than 81,000 such schemes in England and Wales. In many parts of the country police and local agencies are coming together to work in collaboration to tackle crime in creative and innovative ways. The right hon. Gentleman must understand that tackling crime is not merely a matter of Ministers standing at the Dispatch Box waving an imaginary wand over crime. Crime prevention has to do with collaboration between those working on the ground and citizens.

Centrally, we have fostered this development and given it direction—most recently in the issue of a new circular and booklet containing guidance on best practice to all the relevant local services. The crime prevention handbook for the public, "Practical ways to crack crime", has been distributed to more than 4 million households, and demand for it continues.

Our safer cities programme, which the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook mentioned, has established 16 projects across the country supporting more than 700 crime prevention schemes. Central Government are supporting safer cities by meeting the cost of the salaries of the co-ordinating staff and through grant funding. Many of us spend much of our time visiting those centres to see the important work being done to prevent crime in our inner cities and urban areas.

The right hon. Gentleman also promised that, were there ever to be a Labour Government, he would set about creating crime prevention schemes that would be led by local authorities, in partnership, no doubt, with central Government. But I expect that that would cost central Government, or at least community charge payers, some money. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman has informed the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer about this commitment to extra expenditure by a future Labour Government.

The right hon. Gentleman also spoke of his commitment to the recommendations in the Calcutt report. I am glad to confirm that my right hon. and learned Friend will accept those recommendations and is examining the statutory framework for that and for including the sort of example—the taking of a photograph —that the right hon. Gentleman gave. I also want to explain to him the reasons for the inclusion in the Taylor report of the offence of running on to a pitch—something about which the right hon. Gentleman expressed some anxiety. He will recall that there is a proposal in the Taylor report to remove the fences round pitches. If they are removed, the offence of running on to the pitch would be a sensible precaution to take for security reasons—

Mr. Hattersley: The hon. Lady will recall that I said that I had some sympathy with this idea and would look at the Bill; but is running on to the pitch to be prohibited at all forms of public sport?

Mrs. Rumbold: No, we are talking purely about the Taylor recommendations for football.

Turning to the Criminal Justice Bill, the right hon. Gentleman asked about one or two incidents. He also asked about our aim to get cases from magistrates courts to the Crown courts on committal within 112 days. At present, only London and eight counties still operate outside this limit and we are hoping that an announcement on the final phase of custody time limits will be made before the end of the year.

The right hon. Gentleman also suggested the introduction of sentencing councils. I draw his attention to the fact that several people have called for the establishment of such councils as a means of securing greater consistency in the sentencing of offenders. The Government are not persuaded of the need for that. The courts will continue to benefit from the guidance issued by the Court of Appeal and the training provided by the Judicial Studies Board. In addition, they will have in the Bill our proposed statutory framework for sentencing. One of its main aims is to promote a more consistent approach to sentencing.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): What are the Government doing about remand prisoners in police stations in the Greater Manchester area? When I raised this issue, the Home Secretary nodded his concern. First, it is totally inappropriate for prisoners to be kept for long periods in police stations. Secondly, it is a large cost for the Greater Manchester police authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary nodded his head when the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) made that point. One reason for remand prisoners being kept in police cells in the north of England is that the Prison Officers Association refuses to open the wings in Strangeways. Those wings are now ready to accommodate people and could perfectly well take them in. That would save the police force the unacceptable costs to which the hon. Gentleman has drawn our attention and would remove the unacceptable conditions in which people are held. I urge the hon. Gentleman to take up the matter with the Prison Officers Association.

I can tell the right hon. Member for Sparkbrook that the purpose of the Criminal Justice Bill is to achieve the correct and appropriate sentencing of offenders and thereby offer a positive response to crime. It is not intended to empty our prisons, however desirable that might be.

The hon. Member for Barking (Ms. Richardson) said that she supported the provisions for the maintenance of children whose fathers have abdicated their responsibilities. The provisions are even-handed and will apply not only to fathers but to mothers if necessary.

Ms. Richardson: Fewer mothers leave their kids.

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Lady is correct. However, she and many people would quickly accuse the Government of not being even-handed if we did not apply our maintenance provisions to both men and women. The hon. Lady condemned the Government for our policy on maternity leave. It is important to remind her that Britain has a longer period of maternity leave than any of our European partners. It is true that we do not pay some of the women for as long as some of our European partners, but much time off is allowed for women to have children.

It is important to refute what the hon. Lady said about my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Mr. Patten). He is no longer a member of the ministerial group on women's issues. He has handed that responsibility to me. I strongly refute the accusation that that group has not conducted itself and its business very stringently. It has worked hard to produce its five-point plan on child care. Some of those measures are beginning to take effect and more will take effect in future.

The hon. Lady knows perfectly well that the simple test of writing something down and declaring it does not necessarily make it happen. Policies take time to work and I am confident that time will show an improvement. The five-point plan was issued just a year ago.

Ms. Richardson: My understanding is that the ministerial group has discussed only two subjects apart from child care. One is domestic violence, which I gather the group is against, and the other is rape in marriage. I and women in Britain wish that the Government would put some effort into making those two crimes totally unacceptable.

Mrs. Rumbold: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for telling me what the group has discussed. She is right: we have discussed violence and matters concerning rape, and I can tell her that things are definitely happening on that score. She also challenged me to say what else the ministerial group had said. As she may remember, it was set up in response to a call; my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary was the first person to establish such a group to examine forward-looking strategies. That was an extremely important move. A number of issues have been raised, which the group is currently studying. We are now examining the question of employment for women—I know that the hon. Lady will be interested in that.

I noted the comments made by the hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise), to which I shall refer later.

I was interested to hear of the experiences of the hon. Member for Barking today at the National Federation of Womens' Institutes. I would have enjoyed visiting the organisation myself, but was unable to go. As she knows, many women are currently on the ladder and on the way to the very top. We do not ask—as some expect us to—that we should come out of school or university and be made judges immediately; we do not ask for a Ministry for women, or for special concessions. We do not want positive discrimination in our favour. However, we do want our abilities, freedoms and rights to be acknowledged so that we can make our way equally and fairly alongside men on the road to success.

Mr. John Evans: Very slowly.

Mrs. Rumbold: I can refute what the hon. Gentleman says—from a sedentary position. We are making progress faster and faster as time goes on. That is because of the desire of women: that is what women wish to do. Women will continue to be more successful than they would if they were subjected to positive discrimination, which is both paternalistic and patronising.

I must congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, West (Mr. Durant) on coming out of his seven-year silence. It is an awesome return from a sentence, but, as we expected, he made a real contribution. I was delighted to hear his views on the importance of the family to children's early years. I entirely endorse what he said, especially his views about the importance to children of having warm and caring experiences in their early years within their families. Like him, I did not receive a telephone call over the weekend. I am very upset about that, as I share his views on that difficulty.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) gave us sombre words of warning. I fully endorse his views: men and women everywhere must know that they have the right to live free from fear.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Stanbrook) referred to Northern Ireland and to the horrors of terrorism. Of all the rights, responsibilities and freedoms that we have, assuredly the freedom from acts of terrorism is one with which all hon. Members would agree. Opposition Members must be enjoined to think carefully and hard before abandoning efforts taken by the Government to protect us all. Whether we are Members of Parliament or members of the public, we are all innocent victims in the face of terrorism.

I must also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Raison), who spoke about the war crimes Bill. I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has noted his views. My right hon. Friend also expressed concern about the deterrent set out in the White Paper governing the framework of the Criminal Justice Bill. The intention is to have purposeful and demanding sentencing—whether non-custodial or not—to command the respect of the public. I am sure that he will agree that without that confidence no rule of law can be upheld. As he rightly said when referring to asylum and to the 1951 United Nations convention on refugees the Government are obliged to let into the country anyone who claims asylum at an airport or sea port. The Government also have an obligation to maintain proper immigration control in the face of the huge migratory pressures in the world today.

I am sure that my right hon. Friend knows that it is not a matter that affects the United Kingdom alone; it concerns the whole of Europe. We are worried about the greatly increasing numbers and the clear misuse of the asylum procedures. We are urgently reviewing the impact on immigration control and the Government's obligations towards asylum seekers and the arrangements for processing individual cases. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be reassured by that.

[Mrs. Rumbold]

The hon. Member for St. Helens, North (Mr. Evans) will be glad to know that we have abolished detention for 14-year-olds, about which he was concerned. I understand that concern, as I understand the concern of the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Bermingham) about suicides in prisons. I deprecate those occurrences, and I hope that we will be taking urgent action. It is an important and serious issue that must attract the Government's urgent attention. The hon. Member for St. Helens, North also mentioned Red Bank school. The points that he raised are mainly matters for the Department of Health, and I shall draw the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to them when I have an opportunity to do so.

The hon. Member for Preston (Mrs. Wise) spoke about women and work. She has already heard my views on the way in which I hope women will want to pursue their careers to the top of every available ladder. She suggested that women working part time had a bad deal. Some 60 per cent. of women in the United Kingdom are in work, which is one of the highest proportions of women working anywhere in Europe. One reason why part-time work is so successful is that that is what women want. It is important to encourage employers, large and small, to improve the conditions and the opportunties for women to work part time or flexible hours if they find that satisfactory.

Mrs. Wise: We are in favour of part-time work for women who want it, but there is no reason why it should be for rotten wages and in rotten conditions, without the worker having any control. Why will not the Minister agree to the EEC directive on that?

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Lady must study the equal opportunities and equal pay legislation. It is nonsense to make the remarks that she did. If she wants to take issue with that, she must raise the matter with the Equal Opportunities Commission. She can use the provisions under the Equal Pay Act 1970 to ensure that nothing discriminates against women. The EC proposals would result in a large number of women in the United Kingdom no longer having the opportunity to work. If that is what the Opposition want, I urge them to take care because it is not what the women want and it is not what they will vote for.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson) referred to the war crimes Bill and mentioned his views on education, with which I am well acquainted. I agree with his wish for many improvements in educational opportunities and in other areas.

The hon. Member for Caithness and Sutherland (Mr. Maclennan) is not in his place. He complained about the length of time allowed for his speech. He should learn the lesson that those of us who served in local government learned—that one can make a good speech in five minutes, but nothing like such a good speech in 10 or 20 minutes.

I listened carefully to the views of my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Boscawen) on the importance of family centres. I was moved by his views on the War Crimes Bill. No one who heard him could doubt his sincerity and the depth of his opposition to the measure. I know that my right hon. and learned Friend will have noted his views.

I have some concerns about what the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Mr. Bennett) was saying about the defence of our freedoms and how we should handle our affairs in the Gulf. I hope that he shares the view of all hon. Members that we must, whatever else we do, unite with our world colleagues in ensuring that the infringement of Kuwait by an invader is not allowed. It is important that we take action, as we are all declared to do.

It being Ten o'clock the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Photocopy Companies (Pricing Policy)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

10 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): The photocopier is as much a part of business in the 1990s as the telephone. I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for granting me the opportunity of presenting the House with details of an unscrupulous scheme that is costing British businesses and the public millions of pounds. It is fuelling inflation and therefore harming the economy. Unless action is taken to stop it, it will financially cripple photocopier users and drive honest companies selling photocopiers out of business. It affects not only small and large businesses but health boards, charities, voluntary organisations and education establishments—in short, everyone who requires a photocopier.

Anyone who wants a photocopier has a choice of acquiring and financing it in three ways. First, people can buy it outright and pay between 1p and 2p a copy for supplies such as toner and parts. A tamper-proof meter is built into the machine and records a monthly or quarterly leasing charge. That is similar to running up miles on a lease car. Secondly, they can lease the equipment, paying a monthly or quarterly leasing charge, which is similar to buying goods on hire purchase, and then paying for toner and parts on the same per copy basis that I outlined.

The third method is to roll together all the leasing or rental costs with the cost of toner, supplies and parts and to work out an all-inclusive per copy cost. That is commonly called copyplan or serviceplan. That third method of paying for photocopies has been the source of so much abuse, and I am asking the Minister to have his Department investigate it.

In April, the magazine *What to Buy for Business* exposed the copy plan of the Southern Business Group. However, I want to focus the Minister's attention on some of the victims of another company—Eurocopy plc.

Eurocopy's copyplan, serviceplan and rental agreements are among the most restrictive and expensive ways of financing a copier. I have spoken to many charities, businesses and organisations such as health boards that have been duped by Eurocopy. Their losses total millions of pounds. The service plan, rental plan and copy plan operated by Eurocopy is evil. Although there is nothing dishonest about comprehensive per copy arrangements, Eurocopy has used such contracts to amass vast profits from dishonest sales practices. To paraphrase the words of the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath), the unacceptable face of capitalism has given birth to the unacceptable face of copiers.

Like others in the copying business, Eurocopy realises that the secret of making money from photocopiers lies not in selling 10 copiers and making a modest profit on each copier but in selling one copier and making the biggest possible profit on that machine. A profit of £40,000 on a £2,000 copier is routine for Eurocopy's sales force, and members of the sales staff are frequently paid £100,000 on the basis of selling 25 copy agreements a year.

Here is how it is done. A service plan, which sounds like an innocuous agreement to service the machines, is not what it seems; it is often a leasing agreement and frequently is imposed on equipment that the customer already owns. Nowhere is "lease" mentioned. The customer is asked to estimate the number of copies that will be used each month and is then told by Eurocopy sales staff that the contract runs for 18 months and that the equipment is guaranteed for seven years. In fact, the small print on the Eurocopy contract legally binds the buyer to an eight-year contract because of a compulsory one-year additional termination clause. There is a six-year version of that, too.

However, the eight-year commitment to spend tens and even hundreds of thousands of pounds on Eurocopy's equipment is only the beginning of the customer's nightmare. After 18 months, the customer frequently has to pay for all servicing, parts and toner, which can add £500 a year to the bill for a modest machine. Then there is the annual price hike of 15 per cent. on almost every contract.

On 14 July, the Eurocopy group legal director, Mr. Colin Gilbert, sent me the company's latest rental agreement for the wholly owned subsidiary, Purdie and Kirkpatrick. Buried in the small print of no fewer than 28 subclauses is the annual permissable increase of 15 per cent. It is not displayed on the front of the agreement, the part that the customer signs. I want the Minister's Department to investigate the highly inflationary aspects of Eurocopy and other companies' contracts.

It is company policy to add 15 per cent. every year on all costs, including any lease payments. Since the lease costs are fixed at the beginning of the contract, Eurocopy and Purdie and Kirkpatrick can pocket the difference. In fact, Eurocopy leases are set at far higher rates than the standard market rate but, because the leasing costs are buried in the per copy cost, the customer is not aware of the rate that he or she is paying.

More fine print in another contract allows Eurocopy to add 9 per cent. to all bills every six months for the duration of an eight-year contract, so the Eurocopy client finds himself tied to an eight-year contract, not an 18-month one. He finds his costs rising by 15 per cent. or more every year, doubling during the course of the contract. Finally, Eurocopy starts charging him for all supplies after the first 18 months, even though the customer thinks that he has already paid for them. The form that the client signs is designed to mislead. The 18-month trip, after which all costs of toner, supplies and parts are heaped on the back of the hapless customer, is not called a "free supplies period". No, it appears on the Eurocopy form as an "equipment changeover option", and the Eurocopy sales force is thus able to mislead customers into believing that they have an 18-month contract.

I pay tribute to Gareth David of *The Sunday Times*, to David Cameron and Peter Woodifield of *The Scotsman* and Alan MacDermaid of the *Glasgow Herald* for their sterling investigative journalism on this matter of public concern. I have read with worry the statements in the press of Eurocopy. They have implied that only a handful of customers of recently acquired companies have complaints and that they are being treated sympathetically. They are wrong on all counts. Up to half of all Eurocopy customers are on serviceplan-type agreements, although many do not realise that a bombshell will drop on their bank accounts after 18 months.

Far from being treated sympathetically, Eurocopy customers are at best resigned to new long-term contracts at rates far higher than those originally signed for. As the company is expanding by taking over existing photocopying business, it is acquiring lists of new customers all the

[Mr. Nigel Griffiths]

time. In south Wales, it recently took over two photocopy companies. In the past three months, the Eurocopy sales force has been going round stating that its members have taken over the servicing agreements and require a signature for the routine transfer of the paperwork. Firms have then found that the office junior has signed a six-year contract, with built-in price rises soaring above inflation. Those contracts are legally binding. Without help from the Minister's Department, firms will find their expansion plans blighted as Eurocopy sucks out ever-increasing amounts of their profits.

It is worth looking at the history and evolution of copyplan. In two short years, that contract has been refined and modified to ensure the Eurocopy has always kept one step ahead of its potential customers. The original copyplan rolled up all costs and divided them into the number of copies so that the customer received a monthly or quarterly billing on the basis of the number of copies produced. The contract was drafted legally to bind the customer to paying for a minimum number of copies over a fixed period—as long as seven years—whether he actually used them or not. The company then modified the contract to insert the "initial term" or "termination" clause, which obliged the customer to pay for the service for a whole year after the expiry of the original contract.

Then copyplan changed its name to serviceplan. The sales force simply walked into offices and said, "This is a service agreement." No mention was made of leasing or ownership of equipment, and some firms signed over the photocopier that they owned outright without realising it. A further modification to the contract inserted an 18-month equipment change option. That allowed sales staff to pretend to customers that the contract was of only 18 months', as opposed to eight years', duration. It also meant that Eurocopy could start charging for all toner and parts on an additional per copy basis after 18 months. Finally, it allowed the companies' sales force to visit the hapless victims when bills started soaring at 18 months, and to offer to reduce those soaring costs in return for a further eight-year contract.

Those are the basic ingredients of the Eurocopy contracts and those of its subsidiaries, Equipu in England and Wales and Purdie and Kirkpatrick in Scotland. The scheme has been so successful in Scotland that it is known in the trade as the "Glasgow rip-off" or the "Glasgow stitch-up". It is important for the Minister to note that other photocopier and office supply companies are enforcing similar contracts. They are not illegal, but they should be.

Mr. Cyril Gay, Eurocopy's managing director, contends that his firm inherited all its problems from Equipu. That is not the case. The hon. Member for Gloucestershire, West (Mr. Marland) has a letter from his county council, which he has passed to me. It warns that schools operating local management schemes have also fallen victim to Eurocopy. The letter states that, after Equipu was taken over by Eurocopy, there was a mass resignation of salesmen who were unwilling to adopt the practices dictated by the new company.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) has a letter relating to a photocopier worth £4,000, which was installed in a local school. In September this year, the school was paying £5,769 a year for the machine including £585 for supplies. By the end of a seven-year period, the school will be paying more than £14,000 a year. The machine will not even last another five years. The senior staff member had a visit from Mr. Gay's "sympathetic" staff to discuss the contract. His letter sums it up:

"These people are bandits who say that it would cost £46,000 to buy out of the agreement. They should be put out of business."

The firm involved is WDC Office Systems and Supplies Ltd. It is a member of the Eurocopy group, just like Purdie and Kirkpatrick, Equipu, Impress Office Machines Ltd. and Copy Consultants.

The leading British charity representing Britain overseas had a visit from Purdie and Kirkpatrick. Its director writes:

"I too fell victim to the misrepresentations and sharp business practice of this firm, which resulted in a substantial loss"—

to his organisation—

"and for me very serious damage to an otherwise unblemished 25 year career record."

Other staff have not been as fortunate. Lothian health board had a visit from Purdie and Kirkpatrick. It was signed up for 11 machines, at terms so crippling that three members of staff lost their jobs, and the bill for the machines is adding to Lothian's multi-million pound deficit, to the detriment of patient care. The Greater Glasgow health board is another victim, as is Grampian health board. In a memo dated 18 May, the chief internal auditor of Grampian states:

"officers inexperienced in procurement had been persuaded to sign agreements for up to 8 years at charges which can only be described as extortionate."

The memo continues:

"The companies involved are all members of the same group and include Equipu Finance plc, Eurocopy plc, Purdie and Kirkpatrick Limited and Impress Office Machines Ltd."

It appears that the only experience that the Eurocopy sales staff require of their customers is the ability to sign their name. It does not matter how junior they are. It is left to the Eurocopy lawyers to demonstrate that the signature of almost any employee is legally binding.

Mr. Gay has told his shareholders and the press that he inherited the problem. He has not. He has said that it affects only very few customers. It does not. I have seen the minutes of a board meeting of Mr. Gay's company held on 5 March this year. Mr. Gay was at the meeting and was told "Complaint levels are high." His fellow director, Mr. McCall, outlined the problem:

"Our customers costs have always risen as each upgrade occurred but nothing like the 200 per cent. to 300 per cent. that will impact the figures now."

The minutes continued to the effect that that

"can only lead to more questions being asked."

The minutes note that the company was receiving so many complaints that the firm's solicitor, Mr. Joe d'Inverno, could not cope.

On the question of leasing companies being given invoices vastly in excess of the equipment's value, Mr. Gay was told at the meeting:

"Invoice values are now at a level where a leasing company would think twice about accepting the deal."

What is the company's solution? It is not the withdrawal of its contracts that are designed to mislead or an offer to help the unwitting customers who find themselves plunged into debt. Instead the minutes record the action to be

taken: another lawyer is to be employed to handle clients who complain. The minutes also record the problems of recording the profits. They note:

"With provisions and massaging the accounts we can show any figures, but everything is short-term, with no plans for the long-term."

The sad thing about the minutes is the lack of concern for the organisations, charities, health boards and businesses that have fallen foul of those methods. There is no compassion or contrition. The minutes record:

"We would continue to operate under the principle of maximising today's profit."

Eurocopy has acquired a number of other companies and that gives its sales force the chance to go in and sign up unsuspecting clients, as is happening now in south Wales and throughout England and Scotland. The salesmen are peddling the various Eurocopy customer plans with six or eight-year contracts, 18-month triggers and highly inflationary six-monthly or annual cost hikes.

It would not be such a problem if Eurocopy was the only firm using such methods. Unfortunately, it has already spawned a host of imitators in the sale of office equipment. On 12 September the Director General of Fair Trading announced that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission would be examining allegedly monopolistic practices in relation to the supply of toners and parts. I welcome that investigation, but I fear that it will not get to the heart of the problem that I have described.

We need firm action from the Government. First, the scope of the MMC's present inquiry should be extended to cover all practices relating to misleading copyplan agreements. The Department of Trade and Industry should investigate the activities of the Eurocopy group and other businesses adopting similar practices and the Minister should invite evidence from people who feel that they have been the victims of unfair contracts, whether legally binding or not. The Department should ensure that all such existing contracts are renegotiated and it should prepare legislation to void existing contracts if the photocopying firms fail to co-operate. The Minister should publish the findings of his and other Government Departments on the claiming of regional development grants by the Eurocopy group and its satellite companies.

The Office of Fair Trading and the DTI should draw up a fair contract that is transparent and sets out clearly all the costs over the whole duration of the contract, and that model contract should be binding.

Finally, I am concerned at the role of leasing companies in the matter. It appears that Lloyds Bowmaker, Anglo Leasing and others have been providing two leases on the same piece of equipment and recognising leases for vastly inflated sums—far more than the worth of the equipment or its life span.

I hope that organisations affected by unfair contracts will write to me and to the Minister. In short, we need firm action now by the DTI to protect businesses, public services, charities and the public. I hope that the Minister can guarantee that action will be taken without delay.

10.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs (Mr. John Redwood): I have listened with great interest to what the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) has said. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Consumer Affairs sees the record of this debate, as some of it will be of interest to him.

I am a little surprised that the hon. Gentleman has not yet sent me any evidence of the malpractices he has described. It would have been more usual and more helpful had he sent his evidence in confidence to me at the Department before raising the matter on the Floor of the House. It is also a pity that he has seen fit to mention by name certain companies, one of which is still traded on the stock market, before submitting evidence to the appropriate authorities. Nonetheless, I will do my best to answer the points that the hon. Gentleman has raised. I will, of course, with my Department look carefully at the record of what he said when it is available.

The law already affords considerable protections against the sort of malpractices that have been described. Many of the contracts we are discussing were placed with companies. The direct protection of the Consumer Credit Act 1974, in particular in respect of cooling-off periods, is therefore unlikely to apply. But that does not make that Act entirely irrelevant. A licence under the Act is required by any person or company wishing to carry on a consumer hire business. A company may have its licence suspended or revoked by the Director General of Fair Trading if he believes that that company is not fit to engage in the activities covered by the licence.

The director general is already considering the allegations that have been made regarding certain types of photocopier leasing contracts, and he is seeking further information from trading standards departments and other sources. I am sure that he would be interested to see any further evidence that may be produced by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South. I shall ensure that he, too, sees the record of proceedings this evening.

I make it clear that I am willing to consider any evidence that the hon. Gentleman may have which might warrant an inquiry under the Companies Acts. I have received no evidence so far, but if the hon. Gentleman provides any evidence, I will look very carefully at it. But, for reasons of confidentiality, I will not be able to confirm whether we or any other authority are conducting an investigation.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand why that is. Most of the investigations that my Department carries out or other authorities sometimes carry out are done on a confidential basis, because we need to use the confidentiality provision to see whether allegations are well-based. It would not be fair to conduct publicly an investigation into a company or companies where the allegations turned out to be not soundly based. It takes a long time to clear a name, and damage is done in the meantime.

There are, of course, remedies in law for misrepresentation. Under English law—I think that Scots law has a broadly similar effect—misrepresentation may constitute an actionable tort in certain circumstances as well as providing grounds for relief in the law of contract. If the misrepresentation if fraudulent and a person has entered into a contract as a result of it, that person may rescind the contract, or claim damages, or both. He may also plead misrepresentation in defence if the other party seeks to enforce the contract.

In certain circumstances, fraudulent misrepresentation may amount to a criminal offence. If a misrepresentation is negligent, that too can be pleaded as a cause of action or

[Mr. John Redwood]

a defence. Whether any particular company has indulged in fraudulent or negligent misrepresentation would be a matter for the courts, but it is something that the hon. Gentleman should consider when advising those who come to see him.

I understand that the company that was mentioned by the hon. Gentleman may be involved in actions pending before the Scottish courts. Those matters are therefore sub judice, and I am afraid that I cannot comment further on them in view of that.

Substantial safeguards therefore already exist against disreputable selling practices. We should remember that we are not dealing here with the uninformed consumer. We are mainly dealing with professional businesses and large organisations—people who should reasonably be expected to know what they are doing when they enter into contracts. The hon. Gentleman may reply that, in this case, he believes that they were misled. If that was so, as I have tried to indicate, those who signed a contract as a result of misrepresentation have a remedy at law.

In certain circumstances, where a very junior employee is asked to sign a document on behalf of a business or organisation, that business may not be bound by the transaction, because the junior employee may have had no authority to act.

Meanwhile, the working of the market has already begun to remedy the situation. For example, the activities of the Southern Business Group, as mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, were very thoroughly analysed by the magazine *What to Buy for Business* in April of this year. Four months later, that same magazine reported that the management of the Southern Business Group had changed most, if not all, of the practices that had been causing problems, and that many of the companies that had complained had obtained redress. I am sure that we all welcome and approve of that.

The proposal that questionable sales practices should be banned raises formidable difficulties of definition, interpretation and enforcement, while the suggestion that the Director General of Fair Trading be empowered to impose a code of practice ignores the fact that it is the essence of codes of practice that they are freely entered into and policed by the industry concerned; for them to be anything else would raise quite fundamental questions about the nature of contract law and its enforcement.

The hon. Gentleman has suggested that we should go even further and dictate specific types of contract. That would have other implications for the development of the marketplace and the offer of services to customers by bona fide businesses, which I suspect that the hon. Gentleman has not thought through in their entirety and which could well work to the detriment of many of the consumers of those goods and services.

I have stated that remedies already exist and I have demonstrated that, as all the serious malpractices that have been described are either illegal or can be made the subject of legal remedy, there is no need for any precipitate change in the law. We are looking at what has taken place and whether the law can be used to right any wrongs that may have been perpetrated.

As I have said, market forces are already making their contribution to remedying the problem. The business community is now alert to what has been going on—the debate will further help that process—and it seems likely that, in future, the business community will exercise greater care over agreements in respect of photocopying. There is evidence that, in some cases where there have been abuses, the industry is putting its house in order. May that continue to be the case.

In conclusion, the Director General of Fair Trading and I will, of course, study what the hon. Gentleman has said, and any further evidence that he chooses to send us to see whether we need to take action under companies legislation or the Consumer Credit Act and whether some authority or body needs to be involved.

10.26 pm

Mr. Merlyn Rees (Morley and Leeds, South): One of the firms that has been mentioned employs 600 people in my constituency. I wish to raise only one point—indeed, there are sub judice aspects to this in which I cannot become involved. If the Minister is going to consider what has been said in this debate, could he possibly consider the views of that firm, and what it can do to give its point of view?

Mr. Redwood: With your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to reply to the right hon. Gentleman. I am grateful for his contribution and for the permission granted to him by the hon. Member for Edinburgh, South. The right hon. Member for Morley and Leeds, South (Mr. Rees) has already written to me pointing out that there is nothing wrong with the general philosophy of leasing, and stressing that it is up to the purchasers to decide what arrangements suit them best. In normal cases, that is a perfectly good argument. The right hon. Gentleman is welcome to send me anything that he thinks that I and my Department should consider before making any decisions.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 13 November 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

EMPLOYMENT

Training Programmes

1. **Ms. Short:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether he has any plans to review the budget available for training programmes.

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): The results of a review of the whole of my Department's spending plans were published in the Chancellor's autumn statement. The public expenditure settlement provides both the resources needed for training programmes and the flexibility to deploy those resources to best effect.

Ms. Short: Will the Secretary of State confirm that unemployment is rising and set to rise further, that there are skill shortages throughout Britain and that Britain is massively less skilled than our European competitors? Given that situation, how can he possibly defend the £300 million cut in real terms in his Department's budget set out in the autumn statement? Is not that a disaster for our future competitiveness in Europe?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Lady has misunderstood the position. We are increasing planned spending on youth training, increasing spending on TVEI—the technical and vocational education initiative—and we have been reviewing the way in which we can most effectively help the long-term unemployed. We are making available up to 100,000 places in job clubs and on job interview guarantee schemes as well as introducing other ways in which to help the long-term unemployed more effectively. We shall still be spending some £750 million next year on employment training.

Mr. Rowe: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, throughout his welcome experiment on training and enterprise councils, one of the principal difficulties that the chairmen have brought to his attention has been the lack of flexibility in the way in which they can apply their funds? I hope that he will accept from me a warm welcome to his recent proposals to free up the use of funds to give the chairmen much greater responsibility.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is absolutely right about the importance of the flexibility for which the TECs have been asking. His warm welcome for that flexibility has been echoed by the chairmen of the TECs. The TECs are now well beyond the experimental stage. There are 82 in place across the country, forming a complete network, and no fewer than half of them—41—are now fully operational.

Mr. Blair: With the worst balance of payments deficit in this country's history, with skill shortages in every tradeable sector of industry and with the single European market nearly upon us, which of our main competitors would even contemplate cutting £500 million from their training budgets in the next two years? If that is not for them, why is it for us in the Secretary of State's plans?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman should look more carefully at the statement that has been made and devote his attention to the increased resources that have been made available for training our young people and giving them the necessary skills. He should also reflect on the fact that he has totally failed to persuade the shadow Chief Secretary that training should be one of the two priority areas to which the Labour party is prepared to commit extra spending. The hon. Gentleman ought to put up or shut up.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark *rose*——

Mr. Cryer: Defend Heseltine against that ruthless attack by the Secretary of State—a Thatcher sycophant.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: You cannot bring Heseltine into everything.

Mr. Speaker: Order. This should be a question to the Front Bench.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: It is not just the money that the Government spend which matters, because, lamentably, the trade unions and industry do not spend enough money on training their own seed-corn labour for the future. Government money should be spent on encouraging industry and the unions to back labour training schemes because they are the people who will produce for tomorrow.

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to identify the importance of investment in training by employers. That investment has been steadily increasing, but I agree that it needs to increase even further. The TECs, as employer-led bodies in local areas, are in an unrivalled position to persuade fellow employers to do what needs to be done to increase their investment in training and to ensure that that investment is deployed even more effectively than it has been up to now.

Small Businesses

2. **Mr. Vaz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what policies the Government intend to introduce to help small businesses expand to create more local employment prospects.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Eric Forth): The Government will continue to give priority to maintaining the best possible business environment and, in particular, the control of inflation and the reduction of unnecessary controls and red tape. This will benefit all small businesses, whether they are established or just starting up. At local level, training and enterprise councils are taking over responsibility for the

delivery of many enterprise support schemes and are ideally placed to ensure that such support is geared to the needs of local businesses.

Mr. Vaz: None of that will give any comfort to those who currently run small businesses, especially in the textile and footwear sector. Is the Minister aware that one job is lost every 30 minutes in each of those industries? Is he further aware that if that trend continues, there will not be a British textile and footwear industry left by the turn of the century? When shall we have reasonable, decent proposals from the Minister rather than the nonsense that he has talked today?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman must get tired of peddling stories of doom and gloom. It is regrettable that he is unable to say something positive even about the industries for which he alleges great support. It is encouraging to note that, even in the present difficult economic climate, there is a remarkable resurgence of new industry, with new people coming forward and new businesses being set up. That is what we are encouraging and shall continue to encourage and one of these days it will receive acknowledgement from the Opposition.

Mr. Steen: It is not so much expansion but survival that is important for village shops. In my constituency, 12 village shops have closed since the introduction of the uniform business rate. Will my right hon. Friend comment on the maintenance of existing shops and small firms rather than the expansion of those that have not yet come into being?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend raises the important issue of the need to make a distinction, of which I am aware, between encouraging new small businesses—we are remarkably successful at doing that—and the position of existing businesses, in the retail sector and elsewhere. The uniform business rate has had varying effects in different parts of the country, as was the intention from the start. My colleagues at the Department of the Environment have taken great care to try to ensure that the burden of the uniform business rate is limited to the extent that it affects businesses adversely. I hope that the businesses in my hon. Friend's constituency will come to my Department for advice and help, which is available in many different ways, so that they have the best possible chance not just of surviving but of prospering.

Mr. Wallace: Does the Minister accept that the loss of transitional relief under the uniform business rate when businesses move premises can not only restrict expansion but make it difficult for businesses in difficulties to scale down? What assessment has his Department made of that and has the hon. Gentleman made any representations on the subject to the Secretary of State for the Environment?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman is tempting me on to territory on to which I dare not stray—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why not?"]—because another Government Department is responsible for that, as Opposition Members well know. *[Interruption.]* I am in touch with my colleagues at the Department of the Environment constantly to monitor the varying effects of the uniform business rate on small businesses. If hon. Members contact me with details of specific cases, I undertake to raise them with my colleagues in that Department to see what can best be done. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I urge hon. Members not to barrack in such an unseemly way. It is very disruptive.

Mr. Wilkinson: At this time of undoubted recession, when small businesses are being hit particularly hard, it is important for them to be able to retain the greatest proportion possible of their hard-earned profits. Will my hon. Friend discuss with the Chancellor of the Exchequer the possibility in the next Budget of introducing relief against corporation tax on the first £500,000 of the profits of small businesses?

Mr. Forth: The one thing that I cannot undertake to discuss with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor is the word used by my hon. Friend, which I certainly would not dream of discussing with the Chancellor. My hon. Friend raised an important point and I hope that he will agree that we have gone a long way to ensuring that small businesses have one of the lowest rates of both personal and corporate taxation in the developed world, with the favourable rate for small businesses. Our remarkable success in setting up small businesses has reflected that in full. I am making representations on behalf of the small business community to our friends in the Treasury. I shall think carefully about my hon. Friend's helpful suggestion.

Wages Inspectors

3. **Mr. Tony Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many wages inspectors are now in post; and how many were in post in 1979.

Mr. Forth: In 1979 there were 158 wages inspectors. The greatly simplified wages orders resulting from the Wages Act 1986 allowed the then complement of 120 inspectors to be adjusted to the present total of 71. There are currently 70 inspectors in post.

Mr. Banks: May I say how much I agree with your strictures about barracking, Mr. Speaker? It is disgraceful, just like the figures given by the Minister. It is no surprise that so many employers break the law in view of the small number of inspectors. Why are the Government so soft and selective on law breaking? Apparently it is okay for Rupert Murdoch to break the law, seemingly with the connivance of the Prime Minister, and it was all right in 1989 for 5,528 employers to underpay workers in wages council sectors. Why are the Government soft on those law breakers? Is it because robbing the workers is no crime in the Tory book?

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman, perhaps uncharacteristically, displays an appalling lack of knowledge as to how the system works. The truth is that 96 to 97 per cent. of workers are paid the statutory minimum or above, so the non-compliance rate is low. The crucial factor is that not only do inspectors target employers and premises to ensure that they home in on those that they suspect may be in breach of the regulations, but when they find them, they use methods of persuasion and information—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"]. The hon. Gentleman may have a blood lust for prosecutions——

Mr. Banks: Yes.

Mr. Forth: We are much more concerned with the employees' interests and to try to ensure that the employer will continue in business and pay the wages required by the

regulations. That is a far more fruitful way of approaching the issue than that which the hon. Gentleman seems to favour.

Mr. Favell: As 57 wages inspectors to inspect the wages of more than 20 million people must be but a drop in the bucket, would not it be a good idea to clear away the whole system and save the taxpayer some money?

Mr. Forth: I know that my hon. Friend is trying to be helpful, but I will quote from my right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State for Employment, who said earlier this year:

"I have decided not to proceed with the abolition of the councils for the present."

he went on to say, and this may be of some consolation to my hon. Friend——

"I therefore intend to keep its operation under close review."—[*Official Report*, 6 March 1990; Vol. 168, c. *541*.]

That is as far as I can go at present to satisfy my hon. Friend.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: Has not the Minister just let the cat out of the bag? Is not the reason why we do not have a prosecution policy for underpayment and why there are so few inspections of premises and wages inspectors the fact that the Government intend to let the wages council system wither on the vine? The Minister accuses my hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) of being wrong, but the Minister is being outright misleading, because the reality is that 30 per cent. of firms visited were found to be underpaying their employees in one form or another. Is it not about time that the party of law and order made the law work in everyone's interests? When low pay in this country is a growing problem, as it is, Ministers have a responsibility to do something practical, get the inspectors in and get the prosecutions coming.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman obviously formulated his supplementary question before I gave my earlier answer, as he is apparently unaware of what I said to his hon. Friend the Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks). I shall therefore repeat it. The inspectors target their visits on those whom they suspect may not be paying the minima, which is why the non-compliance rate among those targeted is the higher figure that he mentioned, but the overall rate is as I stated earlier. The total non-compliance rate among employers is small. We and the inspectors believe that using persuasion and information is a much better way of dealing with the problem than blundering in with fines and penalties on small businesses which could be put out of business. There is no point in putting people out of business and destroying jobs in an effort to apply minimum wage levels.

Mr. John Marshall: Does my hon. Friend agree that minimum wage legislation can only create unemployment among those receiving low wages, who are among the most vulnerable in our society? Is he therefore surprised by the Opposition's enthusiasm to introduce such legislation?

Mr. Forth: Indeed, it is worse than my hon. Friend suggests. The truth is that if there were a statutory minimum wage of 50 per cent. of average pay, which I understand may be the policy of the Labour party, my Department estimates that 750,000 jobs could disappear as a result. If the Opposition want to be responsible for the destruction of 750,000 jobs that must be on their heads —it certainly will not be on ours.

Employment Rehabilitation Centres

4. **Mrs. Heal:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make a statement on the closure of employment rehabilitation centres.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Robert Jackson): I know that the hon. Lady has important and valuable experience in this area. In the consultative document, "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities", we announced plans for an improved employment rehabilitation service involving local assessment teams and rehabilitation agents supported by a reduced, but substantial, network of centres. No decisions on closure of particular centres will be taken until comments have been received on how best the plans might be implemented.

Mrs. Heal: I recognise the establishment of the mobile assessment teams, which I see as complementary to the existing network of centres. The consultative document makes no reference to the importance of the three residential centres, Egham, Preston and Leicester. Does the Secretary of State regard those centres as essential to the convenience and well-being of disabled people, especially the more severely disabled, and to facilitating their entry into employment? After the next election the Minister and some of his colleagues may welcome the opportunity of assessment for alternative employment.

Mr. Jackson: I do not know whether we shall have the opportunity to take advantage of the hon. Lady's kind offer, but there will continue to be a need for residential facilities, whether provided directly from the centre or by agents under contract, which is the general philosophy being applied in this area.

Mr. Cash: Irrespective of my hon. Friend's comments on the contribution of the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal), will he confirm that the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People this morning reaffirmed the Government's commitment to the disabled with a substantial increase in grants and allowances and that the Government are looking after the disabled in the way that they would expect?

Mr. Jackson: I am happy to agree with my hon. Friend. What has been done with and for people with disabilities by this Government has been one of the success stories of the 1980s.

It is important for the House to understand the background in relation to employment rehabilitation and ASSET centres. There are only about 30 of them, which means that about one third of the population have facilities beyond daily travelling distance. That is why we are planning to diversify and extend the network of provision to make facilities more widely available geographically.

Mr. Leighton: Does the Minister accept that the Government are spending less this year on training, including rehabilitation, than they did last year and that they will spend less next year than this year? When seeking to justify that, will he mention unemployment, which is

rising and will rise further as a result of joining the exchange rate mechanism? Does he accept that the Government's protestations about training will have no credibility so long as the Department acquiesces in cutting the training budget? The job of the Department is to defend that budget against the Treasury, not to acquiesce in cutting it, as it has done for two years.

Mr. Jackson: I cannot agree with the hon. Gentleman that joining the exchange rate mechanism will necessarily lead to increased unemployment. That will depend greatly on what happens in wage settlements and negotiations in the labour market, so there is a clear message for people there. Disabled people under training will continue to be part of the guarantee and aim groups in relation to employment training and we shall continue to fund the training of such groups.

Miss Emma Nicholson: Does my hon. Friend agree that, as usual, the Opposition parties have got it wrong? The purpose of training is not training per se but finding people jobs at the end of training. In that context, is my hon. Friend's Department considering new ways of determining which training schemes are most effective in terms of job finding afterwards? Does he agree that such schemes need not by any means be the most expensive, as budgets are no indication of employment at the end of the day?

Mr. Jackson: My hon. Friend is quite right. That is one of the thoughts behind the flexibility that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State has negotiated for the training and enterprise councils. That flexibility will enable a much greater range of experimentation to take place at local level, which will be led by people who are in contact with local labour markets. To return to the question posed by the hon. Member for Mid-Staffordshire (Mrs. Heal), the basic purpose of our changes is not just to increase the geographical coverage of the facilities but to enable us to tap into the wide range of expertise that exists in voluntary bodies and we shall try to ensure that it is made more available to assist disabled people into better and more appropriate forms of employment.

Employment and Ownership

5. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what fresh initiatives he plans to take to encourage the development of co-operative and mutual forms of employment and ownership.

Mr. Forth: I have announced today that, as part of my Department's general policy to promote small firms, funding has been made available to provide short-term pump-priming support for projects submitted by the co-operative sector. This will be available over the next two financial years specifically for good quality innovative projects to promote co-operatives or to develop business training, advice and other strategies to improve the business performance and competitiveness of co-operatives.

Mr. Michael: I welcome the coincidence of that announcement and my question. Is the Minister aware of the welcome that was given to two commitments by his predecessor, the first being money for the co-ordination of co-operative development work following the demise of the Co-operative Development Agency, and the second being the promotion of co-operative initiatives by the training and enterprise councils? Will he assure the House that he will pursue those two undertakings during his tenure of office?

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his acknowledgement of the follow-up to the commitment given by one of my predecessors. I assure the hon. Gentleman that in the guidance to the training and enterprise councils there is explicit acknowledgment of their continuing responsibility to work in this area as part of the follow-up commitment that we gave earlier in the year. I am delighted to be able to give the hon. Gentleman that assurance.

Mr. David Davis: Will my hon. Friend take some care in this area? I remind him of unfortunate precedents, particularly that of the Triumph motor cycle co-operative which, if anything, accelerated the departure of the motor cycle industry from Britain.

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes an important point. I emphasise that there is no intention to encourage such overblown and grandiose schemes. As my hon. Friend probably heard, I deliberately used the words "good quality innovative projects" and went on to emphasise elements such as business training and advice. I think that I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks—there is no way in which we shall get involved in the kind of disasters that overtook the Labour party when in government.

Labour Statistics

7. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many people are in work in the United Kingdom *(a)* now and *(b)* in 1979.

Mr. Howard: The work force in employment in the United Kingdom stood at 27,346,000 in June 1990 and 25,365,000 in June 1979—an increase of just under 2 million over the period during which this Government have been in office.

Mr. Greenway: Many people choose to take part-time jobs, but such jobs are now under threat because of European Community directives on part-time and temporary workers. Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the European Commission is proposing that all part-time staff who work more than eight hours a week will have to pay national insurance? If that is true, does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is a tax on jobs which could devastate the rural economy and that all hon. Members should unite to oppose it?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right, but he has identified only part of the damage that the European Commission's proposals would inflict on prospects for employment. The costs on employers, in addition to the costs on employees to which my hon. Friend referred, would run into billions of pounds. That is why we are endeavouring to persuade the Commission and other member states of the damage that these proposals would do to employment throughout the Community.

Mr. Ashley: Is the Secretary of State aware that the number of registered disabled people out of work has more than doubled since 1979 and that this is mainly his fault, because he failed to implement the 3 per cent. quota system

and in some ways is condoning law breaking? As he is letting down disabled people, what does he propose to do about finding jobs for them?

Mr. Howard: The right hon. Gentleman will know that the difficulty with the quota system is that there are insufficient numbers of registered disabled people to allow employers to fill the quota. This is one matter on which we consulted in producing our recent consultation document, of which I know the right hon. Gentleman is aware. In direct answer to his question, I can say that, as I am sure he will be pleased to know, as part of the package announced last week, unemployed disabled people are to be included among the aim group for the purposes of eligibility for employment training. I am sure that many more of them will take advantage of those opportunities and will acquire jobs as a result.

Sir Dudley Smith: Is my right hon. and learned Friend aware that one of the more heartening aspects of the situation is the number of people over the age of 50 who are in full-time employment? Is he aware that, at long last, British industry and commerce have recognised the value of older people and that, by and large, most are doing excellent jobs?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right. Employers are increasingly coming to recognise the value of workers aged over 50. They are getting jobs in increasing numbers and I expect that trend to continue.

Mr. Beggs: What progress has been made to detect those who are claiming benefit while being employed and thereby distorting the true figures of unemployment?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. We have been concentrating our efforts in these matters on employers who are suspected of acting in collusion with workers and encouraging workers to break the law in this way. Our efforts are achieving considerable success and have resulted in many prosecutions.

Tourism

8. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the latest estimate he has as to the level of tourism-related employment in Britain; and what the figure was three years ago.

Mr. Forth: In June 1990 there were an estimated 1·43 million employees in employment in tourism-related industries in Great Britain compared with 1·28 million three years before.

Mr. Field: Is not this excellent record entirely due to the efforts of my hon. Friend? Will he confirm that, just ahead of the Isle of Wight, Great Britain ranks fifth in the world for earnings from overseas tourism? Is not it a signpost to encourage the Government in their endeavours to introduce quality into the United Kingdom product that tonight the English tourist board will be presenting the "England for excellence" award?

Mr. Forth: Yes. Few in the House are more qualified to speak on the matter than my hon. Friend, whose constituency leads the way, in the rest of England and the United Kingdom, in our efforts to attract tourists, which are ever more successful. This pleases me, particularly with my responsibility for small businesses, and I pay tribute to our colleague, Viscount Ullswater, who is responsible for tourism in my Department. I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments and let us hope that the efforts will continue, both in his constituency and throughout the realm.

Mr. Cryer: Is not it true that there is a deficit in invisible earnings, which have become truly invisible under this Government? Jobs in tourism are no substitute for jobs with good training in manufacturing industry which, under the Government, have been reduced by over 2 million. That has helped us to a record balance of trade deficit not met by the increase in tourism. When will the Government improve and increase manufacturing industry and restore some of the 2 million jobs that they have thrown on the scrap heap?

Mr. Forth: I regret and deprecate what the hon. Gentleman has said, on two important grounds. One is that the hon. Gentleman has hidden in what he said the welcome fact that our people are sufficiently prosperous that they decide, in ever-greater numbers, to exercise their freedom to take holidays abroad. The hon. Gentleman's remarks are a disgraceful slander on all those who do such excellent work in tourism and I am surprised that he should bring himself to make them.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) said, an increasing number of people are undertaking quality jobs, providing a quality product and boosting overseas earnings. If the hon. Gentleman and the Opposition do not understand that, they are even less fit for government than I thought.

Mr. Ian Bruce: May I welcome my hon. Friend to the Government Front Bench wearing his current hat? Bradford—the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) did not even mention the city which he represents in part—has demonstrated that the market has changed in terms of jobs and opportunities and that people want to spend money and leisure time on tourist-related activities. Bradford constituents, and my constituents in Dorset, South have shown that many new and excellent jobs can be created, to the delight of the many people from overseas and from the United Kingdom who enjoy the facilities that they provide.

Mr. Forth: It is a sign of the times that my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, South (Mr. Bruce) had to say what the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Cryer) should have said. That Conservative Members have to do the job of Labour Members is no more than a sign of the times.

Unemployment, Lambeth

9. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he is taking to reduce unemployment in Lambeth.

Mr. Jackson: My Department's full range of employment, enterprise and training measures is available in Lambeth to help unemployed people and others to find new jobs, to retrain or to set up businesses of their own.

We also have our specialist inner city initiatives, which operate in the borough, including the inner London jobs team and an inner city officer based in Brixton. In addition, under the urban programme the borough has been allocated £9·28 million in 1990-91.

Mr. Fraser: Is the Minister aware that Lambeth has the highest unemployment in London and a large black population and that racial discrimination is always injurious to employment opportunities? Is the hon. Gentleman further aware that some employment agencies connive at racial discrimination? Has the Minister's attention been drawn to a particular allegation that Eileen Dupont of Conservative party central office gave a requirement to employment agencies that she wanted only English-rose type secretaries and to the discrimination that is implicit in that requirement? Will the hon. Gentleman investigate the matter and ensure that both the Conservative party and the Government promote principle, not prejudice?

Mr. Jackson: I am happy to pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's expertise in these matters which goes back to the time when he was a Minister at the Department of Employment.

The hon. Gentleman will be the first to recognise the importance of the achievement of a 19·4 per cent. fall in long-term unemployment over the past 12 months in the Lambeth area. Racial discrimination in employment is serious and the hon. Gentleman has made some allegations. I invite him to provide me with more detail, perhaps in writing, after the end of questions.

Labour Statistics

10. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his most recent estimate of the total of the work force who are employed in more than one job and are thus counted twice in the employment statistics.

Mr. Howard: Precise information on the number of people with more than one job included in the published work force in employment estimates is not available.

However, the labour force survey estimated that 708,000 people held a second job as an employee in the spring of 1989.

Mr. Flynn: Do the Government agree that there is as much truth in their job statistics as there was in the claim, made in 1945 from a bunker by Josef Goebbels just before he took cyanide, that Germany was about to win the war? Before the Government exit in similar circumstances and in a similar fashion, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confess that counting 750,000 double-jobbers twice, including 1 million non-existent self-employed in the totals and multiplying the value of part-time jobs twice corrupts the Government's job statistics into a meaningless, propagandist fantasy?

Mr. Howard: Before the hon. Gentleman engaged in such far-fetched fantasies, he would have done well to check the fact that there has been no change from the practice followed by previous Governments in these respects. However we calculate the figures, there are more people in work now than there have ever been. Opposition Members should be welcoming that fact instead of constantly trying to decry it.

Mr. Harry Greenway: When my right hon. and learned Friend is considering the employment statistics, will he bear in mind the case of Terry Deane of Ealing, who was refused employment by the then Labour Ealing council —which has since been found guilty by an industrial tribunal of the most blatant discrimination—in its housing department in 1987?

Mr. Howard: I am glad that the Leader of the Opposition arrived in time to hear my hon. Friend draw to the attention of the House yet another respect in which the previous Labour Ealing council behaved disgracefully. No doubt that council was elected by, among others, the right hon. Gentleman.

11. **Mr. Terry Fields:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the latest unemployment figures for the north-west region; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: In September 1990 the level of unemployment, seasonally adjusted, in the north-west region was 232,300—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members must be celebrating the fact that there has been a fall of 40 per cent. in unemployment in the north-west region during the past three years.

Mr. Fields: Are not those figures unrealistic? Are not they made up of part-time workers and people who have been conscripted to phoney schemes in a deceitful way? What will be the effects of ERM entry on unemployment? Why are the Government closing job and retraining centres in Merseyside? What will be the effects of the disastrous poll tax figures on councils such as Liverpool city council, which is the largest employer in the area? What will it all mean for employment for the people of Liverpool?

Mr. Jackson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman welcomes the fact that overall employment in the north-west was risen by 347,000 since March 1983, an increase of 14 per cent. There have been many significant developments. I visited the north-west only last week to open the new Stockport and High Peak training and enterprise council. I encourage the hon. Gentleman to get in touch with his local TEC and give it his full support.

Mr. Lee: Is my hon. Friend aware that my constituency has the second-highest level of manufacturing employment in Britain, at more than 55 per cent? Will he encourage my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State to visit Pendle early in the new year—perhaps they could come together—to see some examples of its manufacturing base?

Mr. Jackson: I should be happy to make that suggestion to my right hon. and learned Friend, who has, in fact, heard it. If he cannot visit Pendle, I shall do so.

Mr. McLeish: Why were the unemployed ritually sacrificed in last week's autumn statement, despite the fact that it is estimated that unemployment will rise to 2 million next year? Is the Minister aware that in regional blackspots such as Liverpool, Riverside the male unemployment level is 31·7 per cent?

Can the Minister explain the extraordinary decision to cut £1 billion from the Department's budget in real terms for the period 1988 to 1994? Will he confirm that the Government are opting out of the slick sloganising of the skills revolution, or is it simply a question of the unemployed being asked to eat cake?

Mr. Jackson: The hon. Gentleman is rehearsing his speech for today's debate. Employment training remains an important programme and we shall continue to fulfil our guarantee of training for all 18 to 24-year-olds. We

shall continue to provide training for the aim group, who are older than that. Our evaluation of employment training—we are about to place a summary in the Library—suggests that training may not always, in all circumstances, be the answer to help the long-term unemployed. That is why my right hon. and learned Friend recently made his announcement about jobs clubs and the job interview guarantee scheme. The hon. Gentleman should set that in the context of what he described.

Overseas Visitors

12. **Mr. Gregory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his revised estimate for the numbers and value of overseas visitors to the United Kingdom for 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: During the first eight months of 1990, the latest period for which figures are available, overseas residents made an estimated 12·3 million visits to the United Kingdom, 4 per cent. more than in the same period of 1989. For the same period it is provisionally estimated that overseas residents spent £4,920 million in the United Kingdom, 10 per cent. higher than for the same period in 1989.

Mr. Gregory: Does my hon. Friend agree that overseas visitors contribute substantially to employment opportunities, particularly in centres such as York, and will he hold urgent discussions with my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science so that more courses in hotel and catering management may be made available and so that youngsters entering that great industry are not put off by the Opposition's antics in referring to jobs for ice-cream salesmen?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes an important point and I pay tribute to the leading way in which his constituency is a tourist attraction, providing many more jobs in tourism than it has done in the past. I urge my hon. Friend to approach his local training and enterprise council and work with it to respond to local training needs, helping to boost yet further his already successful tourism industry.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 November.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher) *rose—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to behave reasonably at this time. The Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, including one with Professor Landsbergis of Lithuania. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Is the Prime Minister proud of the fact that her attempts to privatise the national health service have resulted in the loss of nearly 5,000 hospital beds so far this year, including 100 in the Wakefield area? Has she any idea of the pain and discomfort facing vast numbers of patients on waiting lists as a direct result of her policies? Have not we reached the stage when she should be spending more time at home with Denis, making way for a Labour Prime Minister who believes in the NHS?

The Prime Minister: Our policies have resulted in 1 million more patients a year being treated. In the past four years expenditure on the health service has risen from £24 billion in 1988 to £26 billion, to £29 billion and to £32 billion—an increase of nearly 50 per cent. in real terms since we took over. That is a very good record which would never have been surpassed, let alone equalled, by the Labour party.

Mr. Atkinson: What advice did my right hon. Friend give to President Landsbergis of Lithuania in support of his demand for his country's independence?

The Prime Minister: The same advice as I have given him before—that we have never recognised that Lithuania was legally annexed and, therefore, have never allowed ambassadors or consuls in that country. We recognise the difficulties that Lithuania is in now. We believe that they can be resolved by negotiations. We recognise, too, that those have run into unexpected difficulties recently and we shall do our level best to take them up so that negotiations resume.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister join me in agreeing with her new Secretary of State for Education and Science in his very firm opposition to the daft idea of education vouchers?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and learned Friend the new Secretary of State for Education and Science said almost precisely the same as I did in the House. If the right hon. Gentleman had done his homework before he came in, he would know that.

Mr. Kinnock: That gives a new meaning to the word "almost". Why is the Prime Minister being so evasive about the question of education vouchers? After all, all that I asked her was whether she agreed with a Minister in her Cabinet. Why cannot she simply say that she backs the Secretary of State for Education and Science on this important question?

The Prime Minister: In fact, the Secretary of State for Education and Science backed me. *[Interruption.]* We said *—[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This takes a great deal of time from Back Benchers.

The Prime Minister: May I now read to the right hon. Gentleman what he should have read before he came into the Chamber? He will find that my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science said precisely the same as I did, and that I said precisely the same as he did. He will find it—*[Interruption.]* They never like the facts, Mr. Speaker, but perhaps I can get them out. On 18 October in oral answers to questions, I said in reply to the right hon. Gentleman:

> "In education we are attempting to increase choice—in city technology colleges, in grant-maintained schools and with open rolls."

The right hon. Gentleman then asked me about vouchers, and I pointed out that vouchers

"are one, and only one, method of what we are already operating; the money follows the pupil."

—[HON. MEMBERS: "Reading."] Of course, I am reading. Had the right hon. Gentleman read the remarks before he came into the Chamber, he could have saved himself a question.

May I read the sentence again:

"They are one, and only one, method of what we are already operating; the money follows the pupil. That is a form of giving extra choice and of giving the voucher to the parent for the pupil."—[*Official Report*, 18 October 1990; Vol. 177, c. 1374.]

Mr. Kinnock: I thought that the Prime Minister had formally declared herself against stonewalling, but it appears that that does not extend to Prime Minister's Question Time.

Let me put it very simply to the Prime Minister. The Secretary of State for Education and Science said that education vouchers were "not on the agenda". He said:

"I have never been in favour of vouchers. I don't think they play any part in the Government's plans . . . I don't think you need vouchers."

Does the Prime Minister agree with him?

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the complete answer that I gave at column 1374 of *Hansard*, when I pointed out that we are already introducing a pilot scheme for vouchers in training. That is Cabinet policy and in education we are increasing choice. I know that the right hon. Gentleman is against increasing choice, but I repeat that, if he had read my reply, he would not have needed to ask the question. Perhaps he had better go back to bowling from the nursery end.

Mr. Chris Butler: I do not know whether my right hon. Friend has had a chance to watch Sky Television—*[Laughter.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We shall make very slow progress at this rate.

Mr. Butler: Last night there was an absolutely devastating exposure of conditions in Romanian orphanages. The conditions are absolutely disgusting. Will my right hon. Friend review the programme and see whether any initiative can be taken by the United Kingdom Government?

The Prime Minister: I did not see that particular television programme, but I have seen other programmes showing those conditions. Obviously it is something that we would wish to help with. When we received a request from Romania for disposable syringes, for example, we met it immediately. I am very well aware of the problem and we will look at it again.

Mr. Ashdown: Did the Prime Minister see today's disgraceful attack in *The Sun* today made by the supporters of her cause on three of her colleagues? As, in her position, she should set the standards of public life in Britain, will she take this opportunity unequivocally to condemn that attempt to smear her colleagues, undermine democracy in her party and cheapen public life?

The Prime Minister: I share the right hon. Gentleman's concern. Politics is about policy; it should never be about personal attacks on people's way of living. I totally condemn any such personal attacks.

Sir Nicholas Bonsor: Is my right hon. Friend aware that deep concern is felt in our armed forces about the continual suggestions that there should be cuts in our Army manpower at a time when both the Gulf and Northern Ireland place great calls on our strength? Will my right hon. Friend take this opportunity to say categorically that our armed forces will be kept at the level that is necessary for the task facing them?

The Prime Minister: That is an undertaking that I can give. The tasks which face us are changing, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence told the House. We are therefore looking at "Options for Change" and my right hon. Friend is coming across with policies to meet those "Options for Change" which are intended always to ensure that our defence is sure enough to meet whatever attack may come, from whatever quarter it may come.

Gulf Crisis

Q2. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will make a statement on the discussions in Geneva with King Hussein of Jordan in relation to the ecological consequences of war in the middle east.

The Prime Minister: My bilateral discussions with King Hussein did not cover this subject, as I made clear to the hon. Gentleman on 7 November. However, if a tyrant is never to be fought in order that freedom and justice may be restored, tyranny will triumph with all its brutality and the environment of human rights, which we seek to extend, will have received a fatal blow.

Mr. Dalyell: If King Hussein is right and 50,000 million barrels of oil equivalent go up in flames, what will be the result in terms of carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide, and what would that do to people and the planet?

The Prime Minister: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to avert such a tragedy, there is one method which would do it easily—that is for Saddam Hussein to withdraw totally from Kuwait and for a legitimate Government to be restored. I do not necessarily accept King Hussein's figures —mine are a little different—but that is not the main point. Saddam Hussein's withdrawal would not put right a wrong, because of the brutality that has been perpetrated in his name, but that is the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question.

Sir Bernard Braine: Was there on the occasion referred to any discussion of the human consequences of Saddam Hussein's actions so far, such as the killing of tens of thousands of his own people in Iraqi Kurdistan by the use of poison gas and, for example, the killing and torturing of Kuwaiti citizens that is taking place even today in the territory that his armies have occupied? If we are to have such statements, let a proper balance be struck.

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. As he knows, Saddam Hussein has used chemical weapons both in war and on his own people, the Kurds. We were one of the foremost countries to condemn him. We believe that he also has biological weapons at his disposal. It is contrary to the law to make them, let alone to use them. We also believe that he is not far from having nuclear weapons. However, the strongest point is that the

terrible brutalities and barbarities that he has perpetrated cannot just be left. Kuwait must be restored. If Saddam Hussein will not withdraw, we must do it by the military option.

Engagements

Q3. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mullin: May I wish the Prime Minister well in her current difficulty? Although I cannot speak for Conservative Members, many Opposition Members are rooting for her. Is the Prime Minister aware that an auction is taking place today in Sunderland of the assets of the last remaining shipyard, despite the fact that bids were received from companies that were willing, without subsidy, to build and repair ships in that yard? Is the Prime Minister aware that if she had resisted the EC veto with a fraction of the resistance that she has offered in her other European adventures, she would have enjoyed wider support? Will she take this opportunity to apologise to the people of Sunderland?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the closure of that shipyard was announced in 1988 after negotiations with the Commission in Europe. In return for the closure we had a new enterprise zone in Sunderland and a £45 million package to assist the people of Sunderland to come into new industries, the industries of tomorrow, because, as the hon. Gentleman will know, we had too much shipbuilding capacity in this country. It was a reasonable deal for Sunderland and a better one than if we had put subsidies into an old industry. We could not put in extra subsidies because of our agreement with the Commission and, indeed, it would not have been the right thing to do.

Q4. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Tuesday 13 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Mitchell: As the autumn statement has been received by the financial markets and our constituents with great satisfaction, does my right hon. Friend feel that the decision to spend an extra £3,000 million on health will finally give the lie to any suggestion that the Government are not firmly committed to an excellent NHS?

The Prime Minister: Yes. My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It was a settlement which kept firm control of public spending, which is necessary for financial prudence. Nevertheless, it found sufficient resources to meet our commitments to the social services, pensioners and health and extra for the disabled, while at the same time redeeming some past debt, much of which was built up by the Opposition. That is an account of very good stewardship on the part of my right hon. Friends the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and the Chancellor of the Exchequer and I congratulate them both.

Telecommunications

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and President of the Board of Trade (Mr. Peter Lilley): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on telecommunications.

I shall make proposals aimed at increasing competition, stimulating innovation and widening customer choice in all areas of the market. In November 1983 the Government gave a commitment that—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber do so quietly, please?

Mr. Lilley: —for a period of seven years, they did not intend to license operators other than British Telecom and Mercury to provide basic telecommunications services over fixed links. We said that this commitment, which became known as the duopoly policy, would be reviewed at the end of that period.

I am today publishing a wide-ranging consultative document entitled "Competition and Choice: Telecommunications Policy for the 1990s". Copies are available in the Vote Office and will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The document invites comments by 14 January 1991. I will announce the conclusions as soon as possible thereafter.

This country enjoys one of the most open and dynamic telecommunications markets in the world. In the past 10 years, the Government have introduced competition into all sectors of the market, including the supply of equipment, the running of networks and the provision of services. We have also privatised our main operating company, British Telecom.

The benefits of those decisions are now clear. Customers have a real choice in the equipment that they buy; they no longer have to wait for months to have a telephone line installed; BT investment has doubled to around £3 billion a year; Mercury is established as a serious competitor and has installed a national digital network that far exceeds in coverage its licence obligations; prices have fallen by over 20 per cent. in real terms since BT's privatisation and by a third in areas where competition is strongest, for example trunk calls; we have the two largest mobile phone networks in the world; and companies are now committed to major investments in cable television and personal communications networks.

Those benefits have been greatest where the market is most open and competition is strongest. It is time to build on these achievements by further opening up our telecommunications market to increased choice and competition.

My main proposal is that we should end the present duopoly policy. There would in future be a presumption that applications for licences to run telecommunications systems should be granted unless there were specific reasons to the contrary. The proposals in the document are aimed at strengthening competition and increasing customer choice in all three tiers of the telecommunications system: the local network, the trunk network and international services.

In the local network there is little competition as yet, but nearly 70 per cent. of the homes in the country fall within franchises awarded to cable television companies. The Government and the Director General of Telecommunications wish to encourage these companies to provide telecommunications as well as entertainment services. The director general proposes several measures, in particular to reconsider the restriction on cable companies providing voice telephony except in conjunction with BT or Mercury.

I have considered whether BT and other national public telecommunications operators should be allowed to provide entertainment services over their main networks. Consumers might theoretically benefit from that through lower prices. However, the prospect of BT entering the market might deter cable companies from investing, even if BT did not enter the market itself. The consumer would then lose out, both on the provision of cable entertainment and on the benefits of competition in local telephone services.

I am therefore proposing that BT should not be allowed to provide entertainment services until 10 years after the completion of the duopoly review. If, however, seven years after the completion of the review the director general advises that an earlier date would be likely to promote more effective competition, we would consider bringing forward the 10-year limit.

In the trunk area of the market, I would be inclined to consider favourably applications for new licences to run networks. The director general favours the progressive introduction of equal access to give customers greater choice over who should carry their calls. I also propose that utilities should be able to develop their assets for telecommunications purposes, provided that the resulting competition is fair and firmly in the private sector.

In the area of international telecommunications, the director general has already made it clear that he intends to seek a price cap on BT's international services. The director general has also considered the remaining restrictions on the ability of companies to compete with BT and Mercury by leasing circuits from them and reselling capacity to third parties. He has advised me that those restrictions should be lifted in relation to countries which allow an equivalent resale of international capacity. I welcome that advice and invite comments on the director general's conclusions and on the timing of their implementation.

I propose that the duopoly policy should be ended for international telecommunications as elsewhere. I propose also a major liberalisation of two-way satellite services.

BT's prices are subject to regulatory control. It argues that its call charges are too high relative to cost, while its charges for exchange line rental and connection are too low. It therefore seeks to be allowed to restructure its prices, so as to recover more revenue from rentals and connection charges and correspondingly less from calls.

BT is already allowed to restructure its prices to a certain extent as part of the existing price controls that it agreed as recently as 1988. In the light of that and other considerations, the director general has concluded that a case has not yet been made for any greater restructuring than is currently allowed. He therefore proposes that the present price constraints should remain in place until they are reviewed in 1993.

This country has already benefited from our policies of privatisation and competition. Other countries are now following our example. Privatisation has recently taken place in New Zealand and is being actively considered in countries as diverse as Malaysia, Poland and Mexico.

Competition is being introduced not just in places such as Japan and Australia, but even in the tightly regulated markets elsewhere in Europe. Moreover, because of the United Kingdom's lead, this country is becoming a telecommunications "hub" for western Europe.

The Government are committed to reinforce that lead and to ensure that consumers have the widest possible choice of high quality services at the most competitive price.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): Does the Minister agree that the real test of his duopoly review will not be theoretical but practical—that of a genuine improvement in standards and of a reduction in cost for the 19 million households currently each paying a £78 standing charge, a 15 per cent. increase in cheap rate local calls, and an average 9 per cent. rise in bills? All that is on top of a £148 connection charge, for a service that generates half a million complaints every year.

Why do the Minister's proposals do nothing to set targets for the quality of service, set no objectives for long-term research and investment, offer no promise of lower prices and do nothing for more than 3 million households that cannot afford a phone? While we welcome competition in the area of mobile communications and personal communication networks, and believe that, if there is to be genuine competition, British Telecom should not be excluded from competing in those areas—as the Minister has proposed today—or from distributing television pictures, and although we will endorse further competition where it is in the public interest, we hold the view that competition is not itself a substitute for regulation in the interests of the consumer. No telephone company in Europe or the world successfully meets the needs of ordinary consumers without active public regulation.

Will the Minister explain why, according to his statement, Britain is to be the only country in Europe that intends to reduce consumer regulation over the coming years? Will he repudiate the Minister of State's statement that regulation should be reduced and instead state clearly that competition in new areas will not provide the excuse for the Government's complete abdication of their responsibilities?

Will the Minister now face up to his regulatory responsibilities in the public interest? Will he impose on all companies clear quality of service targets encompassing speed of repairs, accuracy of bills and automatic refunds where service is poor? Will he set the objective for all companies of reducing installation and standing charges? Given that British Telecom is enjoying record profits, will he act to prevent charges to ordinary consumers for directory inquiry services? Will he lay down guidelines for improved investment in new high technology, to make Britain genuinely a world leader and put an end to the situation in which British Telecom spends only 2 per cent. of its income on research—and Cable and Wireless substantially less—compared with 4 per cent. in Japan, France and other competitor countries?

Given that 90 per cent. of homes in Germany, 93 per cent. in America and 98 per cent. in France have telephones, but that only 86 per cent. of British households have a phone, will the Minister set targets for increasing connections, so that phone ownership will reach the level enjoyed by our major competitors by the year 2000? Will the Minister insist on the provision of a proper service for low-income users of the telephone—one that does not offer most benefits to rich people having high incomes and second homes, when those in real difficulty are people on low incomes living in their first and only homes?

Will the Minister expand Oftel's role to that of a genuine consumer protection commission whose activities will include public hearings, so that telephone executives will not be able to hide from public criticisms, which should be answered, concerning British Telecom's pricing policy, quality of service, profits, and future plans?

Six years after privatisation, Britain's call costs are the highest in Europe. Its connection and standing charges are also among the highest and now there are plans for new charges. However, the Minister spoke today only of "the theoretical" benefit of his proposals to the ordinary consumer. When will he realise that 19 million households want not a charter primarily to allow foreign cable companies to make money, but one that serves British consumers—and a Government who are prepared to act in the public interest in ensuring improved standards, lower prices, and a telecommunications service that is run for the many and not simply to make huge profits for the few?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) wants to go back to a nationalised system, fully regulated, with no choice, no competition, poor standards and the difficulties we once had to get lines installed. He pays lip service to competition, but all his emphasis is on regulation. That is an extraordinary paradox, because under Labour there was no regulator for the telecommunications industry. The Fabian Society document, which I note the hon. Gentleman has read, recorded that the Post Office was left to regulate itself. We introduced a regulator independent of the Government and of the telecommunications suppliers, which is by far the best system and much superior to the one that preceded it.

The hon. Gentleman has claimed that we are the only country to be reducing regulations, but that is nonsense. Throughout the world, countries are learning from our example and are seeking to reduce unnecessary regulation and introduce more competition. Competition is beneficial, but it cannot be relied on exclusively in an industry where there is a single, dominant supplier. That is why we continue with an effective regulator.

The hon. Gentleman wants us to lay down quality standards, but he ignores the fact that, for the first time, we have introduced penalties for delays in repairs or the installation of a new line. We are the only country to have such penalties and they are much more effective than the mere indicative standards that the hon. Gentleman has sought.

The hon. Gentleman wants to increase the mismatch between prices and costs. That is an extraordinarily bad policy to adopt towards prices; I believe that it is more sensible that they should reflect underlying costs. The hon. Gentleman wants to go back to a system whereby £250 million is paid by ordinary households for directory inquiries, when the bulk of them are undertaken by commercial organisations. Now that BT is introducing a charge for directory inquiries, the costs will be transferred to the people who seek those inquiries and, as a result, a quarter of a billion pounds will be taken off the charges that households face. In March next year, charges will be

[Mr. Lilley]

reduced by 4·5 per cent. on local calls and 7 per cent. on trunk calls. Those reductions will be introduced at the same time as the charges for directory inquiries.

The hon. Gentleman claims that British Telecom only spends 1·9 per cent. on R and D. That is correct, and it is exactly the same as was spent under the previous Labour Government. The big difference is that BT's turnover has increased enormously, so the extent of R and D has increased. The international comparisons in which the hon.Gentleman indulged are a dangerous game, because in different countries research and development might be carried out by the telecom operators or by the equipment suppliers. In this country, our equipment suppliers invest a higher proportion of turnover in R and D than do our continental competitors.

The hon. Gentleman has claimed that our charges are higher than those on the continent, but the director general carried out an independent survey of a basket of charges and deduced that our charges are broadly the same. The hon. Gentleman has argued that the benefits will go primarily to foreign cable operators, but I believe that the harm that the Labour party would cause would be felt by the millions of shareholders in BT and Cable and Wireless who directly participate in the industry. We should support them and pay no attention to the criticisms of the Labour party.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I remind the House that we have an important debate ahead of us today, when a large number of right hon. and hon. Members want to participate. I shall allow questions on this statement to continue until 4.15. We will then have the introduction of Members, followed by that important debate.

Mr. Kenneth Warren (Hastings and Rye): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, in the course of the consultations, the office of the regulator and the efficiency with which that office carries out its task will be taken into account and be open to discussion? May I also be assured that the regulatory system that is introduced after the consultations will in no way debilitate the ability of Mercury and British Telecom, because of increased competition available thereafter to foreigners in this country, in the world markets in which they seek to operate?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes two good points. First, I assure him that the director general will be consulted at all stages of the consultation, that he has participated fully in drawing up the document and that he supports all the recommendations in it. Secondly, I agree that it is important that British companies should be enabled and encouraged to participate on the world stage. Indeed, they are well placed to do so, because they are privately owned and are the favoured operators in many countries. That is why British Telecom, for example, has won a contract for 3 million telephones to be installed in Thailand, Cable and Wireless is a participant in Japan and so on. We shall do nothing to undermine that and everything to support it.

Mr. Alfred Morris (Manchester, Wythenshawe): Why are there no proposals in the document about the particular problems and needs of disabled people?

Mr. Lilley: That matter is discussed in the document. I appreciate that the right hon. Gentleman will not have had time to read it in full. The director general has consulted British Telecom and is seeking to encourage BT to spend yet more. Last year it spent £3 million on the disabled. I believe that it is committed to spending £4 million on a special unit for the deaf and, naturally, we support BT undertaking such social obligations.

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): It is odd to hear the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) running down BT, when his party's Fabian Society said recently that it was hard not to be impressed with the pace of change in the last few years. Is it not a fact that the Government's telecommunications policy has been one of our great success stories? Following liberalisation and privatisation, we now have two international companies of great esteem, BT and Mercury and, even more important, thousands of small companies that could never have entered the market without that liberalisation. May we have an assurance that, under his proposals, there will not be any unfair advantage to nationalised companies compared with private sector companies, which want competition to be increased? In other words, may we be assured that he will not lean in favour of public sector companies?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the excellent Fabian Society document, with which I found much to agree, and to emphasise the importance of jobs in the industry, in the many subsidiary companies engaged in activities related to telecommunications, in the importance for industry as a whole of having an efficient and dynamic telecommunications sector and in the importance of winning markets abroad. As for the position of foreign state-owned companies that wish to participate in this country, I shall, of course, pay close attention to the degree of state ownership when considering granting a licence. Privatisation has been successful, and we do not wish to encourage nationalisation by the back door.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that, while all the smart waffle from the Labour Front Bench fails to disguise the freephone line to renationalisation, the Minister's commitment to privatisation appears to be somewhat limited? Is it not a fact that the apparent decision not to liberalise the price regime until 1993 is likely to keep British Telecom profits up artificially? How far is that related to the Government's wish to maintain a high value of their own shareholding of BT? Will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that, whatever happens in the necessary freeing of the telecommunications industry to market forces, a fair deal is ensured for rural subscribers?

Mr. Lilley: I am not sure that I understood the point that the hon. and learned Gentleman was trying to make. The regulatory system puts a limit on the amount by which prices can rise. It does not boost prices. We have in the review increased the scope and extent of competition, which may keep prices below their limit in some areas of the market, and increasingly so as competition spreads. The agreement with the director general runs to 1993 and can subsequently be extended with another agreement.

We have made it absolutely clear, as has the director general, that we wish to see continuing adequate provision

for rural users. There must be grave doubts about whether it is more expensive to supply them, as some people suggest, or much the same, as others allege.

Mr. Edward Heath (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Is my right hon. Friend aware that British Telecom has dramatically, in one step, raised the cost of a wake-up call to £2·49 per call—£17·46 a week? Therefore, is he surprised that the greater part of the nation can no longer afford to be woken up?

Mr. Lilley: I am sure that my right hon. Friend has never had that problem or needed that service. He will be pleased to know that, now that there is competition on so-called value added services over the line, he will be able to seek a more cost-effective competitor, and I suggest he does so.

Mr. John McWilliam (Blaydon): May I declare my interest, which is the same as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Stott)? I am sponsored by the engineering section of the National Communications Union. Does not the Minister accept that his proposals for the local loop will produce no competition in reality, particularly in rural districts? Does he also accept that the development of a national broad band network, which industry and commerce need going into the next century, will not happen under his proposals? Finally, does he accept that the proposals to allow foreign cable competitors into our market, while we do not have equal access into theirs, could be widely seen by many of us as little short of economic treason?

Mr. Lilley: First, I pay tribute to the members of the hon. Member's union and employees of British Telecom and other companies generally. They have demonstrated that, once freed from the shackles of nationalisation, they are well able to compete internationally, and produce excellent and improving services and that there is nothing wrong with them.

I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's points. His suggestion that there has been no additional competition in rural districts is not necessarily the case. We are looking for competition to come into local networks in three ways —first, the cable operation, which might not extend into some regional districts; secondly, the expansion of the mobile networks, possibly allowing them to introduce relationships with fixed links that might be of value in those districts—radio communication is already being used by BT in rural districts, which is one reason, as I have said, that it is not necessarily more expensive; and thirdly, equal access will be made available to people progressively across the country, if that is the eventual conclusion of the consultation. That will ultimately be just as available to those in rural districts as to those in urban ones.

As for international companies, we are seeking to enable BT and other companies to participate in other markets, just as we allow other companies to participate in ours.

Mr. John Gorst (Hendon, North): In welcoming my right hon. Friend's statement, may I ask him whether it is possible to hope now, as a result of what he is implementing, a reduction in the cost of calls from car telephones and other forms of mobile telephones? Can we now look forward to an acceleration in the use of mobile telephones in Europe?

Mr. Lilley: As my hon. Friend knows, we recently licensed three new PCN operators, in addition to the two mobile operators and the four telepoint operators. Competition between them should extend the coverage of mobile networks and ultimately reduce charges, which I am sure my hon. Friend will welcome.

Mr. Ted Rowlands (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney): Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that there is no competition over telephones in my community and there is no likelihood of delivering the number of television services unless cable television is introduced? The Minister has shut the door on the possibility of British Telecom delivering cable television. Surely that option should remain open if the Minister is to force other cable television companies to come into communities such as mine.

Mr. Lilley: The danger is that, if we gave British Telecom the right to pass entertainment services over its network, the cable operators would never invest in the necessary network because they would fear the eventual entry of BT. So we might end up with the worst of all possible worlds: neither BT nor the cable operators. That is why we believe that there is a need for a degree of regulation in this area to allow alternative competitors to build up over a period of up to 10 years. I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman will find that those on the Opposition Front Bench agree with him on this.

Sir Peter Hordern (Horsham): Will my right hon. Friend increase the powers of Oftel? Is he aware that the Director General of Oftel wrote to me a short while ago agreeing with me that the restrictive practices that British Telecom operates by not allowing the addresses which are freely available in telephone directories to be revealed to those who inquire of telephone directory inquiries are indeed restrictive practices and should be abolished? Why should a service that is so widely in demand by people who merely want to write a letter to someone who happens to live in another part of the country be refused by British Telecom and not be allowed to be provided to any other agencies that might like to provide it?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I shall discuss it with the Director General and see whether there is a case for taking it forward.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that he is dealing with a complicated and important issue in the context of areas such as Scotland? Not only do the proposals deal with communications by telephone; they have an important impact on information technology, too.

Why does the infant industry argument apply to protecting areas in which 70 per cent. of people have cable television but not to rural areas? Why is there no positive discrimination to ensure that rural areas and other parts of Scotland get the services they require if industry and commerce are to be sited there after 1992?

Mr. Lilley: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is not aware that the Highlands and Islands area made a principal sales pitch out of the fact that it is in the forefront of introducing digital technology, which is a great attraction to new service industries and companies coming to the area. That has been achieved by this Government.

Mr. Roger Knapman (Stroud): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his excellent statement? Will he disagree with the opinion that BT is a natural and necessary monopoly, the phrase used by the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith)?

Mr. Lilley: It is clearly the dominant supplier at the moment. Through these proposals and this review we are seeking to determine whether we can extend competition into areas that it has not reached and deepen it where it exists already. There is nothing natural and inevitable about a monopoly in this area, especially as new technologies open up new opportunities for introducing competition. Happily, we are at the forefront of exploiting these new technologies world wide.

Mr. Terry Lewis (Worsley): With the introduction of new players to the field, will the Secretary of State consider statutory supervision of the entertainment services?

Mr. Lilley: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point and the campaign that he has waged on this, with which I have some sympathy. He will know that people already can be prosecuted for obscene communications over the telecommunications network, either by individuals or by the police; and that there is a voluntary code of practice with a number of safeguards to prevent the abuse of these services.

Mr. Robert Hayward (Kingswood): Like the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam), I declare a financial interest in this matter: it is the subject of public record. Will my right hon. Friend give serious attention not only to state-owned companies but to privately owned monopolies in other countries that might make bids for trunk operations? What time scale does he have in mind for implementing this document?

Mr. Lilley: It is not our practice to exclude foreign private investment in this country. As one of the largest investors overseas, we would be the last to try to introduce barriers to the flow of investment in either direction. We shall try to ensure that companies that inhibit BT, Cable and Wireless or other companies from operating in their countries remove those restrictions. We shall argue that within the context of the GATT round.

Mr. Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull, West): Is the Secretary of State aware that, when considering in his statement the various organisations that are competing in the telecommunications market, he made a serious omission? He left out Kingston Telecommunications a company which provides cheaper telephone services and a far better quality service than BT and which is developing value-added networks. Will he confirm that the review will in no way impair the excellent work over recent years to develop this high-technology company, which is much loved by the people of Humberside?

Mr. Lilley: I can confirm that to the hon. Gentleman. That company has been a little beacon of competition in the former state sector and it has pioneered a form of equal access which will undoubtedly have lessons for the rest of the country. We welcome that.

Mr. Phillip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): Bearing in mind the fact that, since 1979, the Opposition have opposed every attempt by the Government to introduce more competition to the telecommunications system, does my right hon. Friend agree that they have a cheek to sneer at his statement? Do they think that people easily forget that if they had had their way over the past 11 years we would still have a telecommunications system that was a cosy state-run monopoly, run for the benefit of the unions and not the consumers, and probably still supplying dial telephones after a six-month wait?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If one wants a case study, one has only to look at the introduction of mobile telephones in Britain and Germany. Here we introduced two competitors, but in Germany there is a state-run monopoly. Now Britain has a market that is five times the size of the market in Germany.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): Does the Secretary of State appreciate that at least part of the increased profits shown by British Telecommunications arises from its disgraceful decision to take a contributions holiday from the workers' pension fund because it decided that there was a surplus in that fund? When the Secretary of State pays tribute to those workers, will he condemn the action of BT in robbing the pension fund in order to inflate its profits? When he was asked about provision for disabled people, he said that it was mentioned in the document. What are the specific proposals?

Mr. Lilley: I mentioned some of the specific proposals in answer to an earlier question. Already BT spends about £3 million on the disabled. There is special provision in the charge for directory inquiries to exempt blind people, and they will have the benefit of lower call charges and so on.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the cable television industry is poised to make an investment of some £4 billion in the infrastructure of this country and that that will have considerable benefits for both domestic and business consumers? I think that my right hon. Friend may know about my interest in this case. Does he agree that that investment would be prejudiced unless it is made on fair terms and that therefore the bar on BT carrying entertainment is critical? will he explain how the 10-year bar on BT carrying entertainment might be reduced to seven years and how that would operate?

Mr. Lilley: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. In our judgment, a guarantee period is necessary. Initially, we propose 10 years, but it is suggested in the document that if, after seven years, the director general believes that the industry is sufficiently well established and profitable and that competition can be further enhanced by shortening that time scale, he will do that. However, he will not make that decision until seven years have passed and then only if he judges that things have gone very well until then. The hon. Member for Falkirk, East (Mr. Ewing) asked about pension funds. I never question points made by actuaries. I can only assume that the actuary was well satisfied with the success of British Telecom's pension fund in investing in other healthy British companies.

Mr. Roger Stott (Wigan): The Secretary of State will be aware of the great strides made by British Telecom in the fibre-optic broad band networks. Before that network can be introduced to the local loop, it will be necessary for British Telecom to provide finance for the loop. Is the Secretary of State aware that that can only be done if the

asymmetry rule is withdrawn? Why is he forbidding competition by not allowing British Telecom to carry entertainment on its lines? That would provide finance for fibre optics in the local loop. Why is he against such competition?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Member is right. There have been considerable advances in the use of fibre optics. Before privatisation, BT had 13,000 km of fibre optics entrenched. It now has 1·1 million km of fibre optics installed. The question is whether we should compel or artificially encourage the further extension of this. The Labour party is committed to making BT cover the country with fibre optics. I agree with the Fabian Society that that is a silly policy and that it is not for the Government to choose between alternative technologies. As to whether this could be facilitated by removing the asymmetrical policy, I believe that my other arguments are compelling. It is open to BT to introduce fibre optics and other devices to bring telephony to the household before the 10 years are up, if it so wishes.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the view, promoted by Mercury among others, that ending the duopoly at this point will reinforce BT in its predominant market share, while myriad smaller suppliers compete for 15 per cent. or whatever of the market, in turn making it difficult for any competitor of comparable size to BT to emerge. I do not necessarily subscribe to that view, which could be dismissed in the case of Mercury by saying, "It would say that anyway," but I invite my right hon. Friend to give us his views on that issue.

Mr. Lilley: Yes, that is an important question, to which one needs to respond. Mercury is well established and a viable and strong company. It will potentially benefit from a number of proposals in this document. For example, the extension of competition to local networks will, even if not carried by Mercury itself, feed more calls into the Mercury network as, very often, those new competitors will wish to channel calls through the competitive Mercury system. The introduction of equal access, if we go ahead with it, will also probably help Mercury, and it has advocated it. A number of the measures that we have proposed will strengthen rather than undermine Mercury.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): I warmly welcome the statement, because competition and choice will benefit customers. As we have two of the largest mobile telephone networks in the world, has the Minister any plans to recommend to the manufacturers of mobile telephones that they should carry a security warning?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Gentleman may be pleased to know that the introduction of the new digital technology next year will make interception far more difficult. I shall make sure that a certain Minister in the Northern Ireland Office is one of the first to receive the new technology.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): My right hon. Friend referred to the importance of fibre optics. Will he undertake to allow British Rail to use its fibre optic network? Does he think that the decision to offer more licences will have any impact on BT's proposals to charge for directory inquiries?

Mr. Lilley: I propose in the document that utilities such as British Rail should be able to compete and receive licences so long as they do so fairly and firmly in the private sector. That means that they must not give exclusive wayleaves over their land to one private company, and if they participate in a private company, it should be majority private owned. I hope that that will meet my hon. Friend's concerns.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington): Did the Secretary of State use the clout that goes with retaining 49 per cent. of the shares in BT to argue against the introduction of charges for directory inquiries? Does he intend to sell that stake before May 1992?

Mr. Lilley: The hon. Member is quite unaware that the quarter of a billion pounds spent on directory inquiries will be paid by those making the inquiries and that every penny of it will come off the charges paid by ordinary users. Charges will be reduced by 4·5 per cent. for local calls and 7·3 per cent. on trunk calls, at the same time as charges are introduced. Many of these inquiries are carried out by commercial organisations such as marketing firms. I see no reason why households should subsidise marketing organisations.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): My right hon. Friend has referred to the fact that the Government remain a 49 per cent. shareholder in BT, and he alluded to the fact that, although some things may be legal, they are highly undesirable, such as nasty phone lines. We know that BT responded to widespread anger at the way in which they were being used. May I refer my right hon. Friend to the BT advertisement that appears on page 19 of *The Sun* and to that on page 10, which draws attention to the privatisation of electricity supply, and say to him, as the thought of the day, that we should judge people by their supporters and that Government advertising should no longer support *The Sun* if is behaves as it did on the front page of today's edition, which is how the Russians behaved during the mid-1960s to Commander Courtney?

Mr. Lilley: I entirely endorse my hon. Friend's remarks. I thought that the front page of *The Sun* was disgusting and I did not get to page 19. I hope that it will not be repeated. However, I do not want to see Government advertising used in a discriminatory way according to the contents of newspapers.

NEW MEMBERS

The following Members took and subscribed the oath:

Terence Henry Rooney Esq., for Bradford, North.

Joseph Edward Benton Esq., for Bootle.

Personal Statement

Mr. Speaker: I remind the House that a resignation statement is heard in silence and without interruption.

4.19 pm

Sir Geoffrey Howe (Surrey, East): I find to my astonishment that a quarter of a century has passed since I last spoke from one of the Back Benches. Fortunately, however, it has been my privilege to serve for the past 12 months of that time as Leader of the House of Commons, so I have been reminded quite recently of the traditional generosity and tolerance of this place. I hope that I may count on that today as I offer to the House a statement about my resignation from the Government.

It has been suggested—even, indeed, by some of my right hon. and hon. Friends—that I decided to resign solely because of questions of style and not on matters of substance at all. Indeed, if some of my former colleagues are to be believed, I must be the first Minister in history who has resigned because he was in full agreement with Government policy. The truth is that, in many aspects of politics, style and substance complement each other. Very often, they are two sides of the same coin.

The Prime Minister and I have shared something like 700 meetings of Cabinet or shadow Cabinet during the past 18 years, and some 400 hours alongside each other, at more than 30 international summit meetings. For both of us, I suspect, it is a pretty daunting record. The House might well feel that something more than simple matters of style would be necessary to rupture such a well-tried relationship.

It was a privilege to serve as my right hon. Friend's first Chancellor of the Exchequer; to share in the transformation of our industrial relations scene; to help launch our free market programme, commencing with the abolition of exchange control; and, above all, to achieve such substantial success against inflation, getting it down within four years from 22 per cent. to 4 per cent. upon the basis of the strict monetary discipline involved in the medium-term financial strategy. Not one of our economic achievements would have been possible without the courage and leadership of my right hon. Friend—and, if I may say so, they possibly derived some little benefit from the presence of a Chancellor who was not exactly a wet himself.

It was a great honour to serve for six years as Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and to share with my right hon. Friend in some notable achievements in the European Community—from Fontainebleau to the Single European Act. But it was as we moved on to consider the crucial monetary issues in the European context that I came to feel increasing concern. Some of the reasons for that anxiety were made very clear by my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) in his resignation speech just over 12 months ago. Like him, I concluded at least five years ago that the conduct of our policy against inflation could no longer rest solely on attempts to measure and control the domestic money supply. We had no doubt that we should be helped in that battle, and, indeed, in other respects, by joining the exchange rate mechanism of the European monetary system.

There was, or should have been, nothing novel about joining the ERM; it has been a long-standing commitment. For a quarter of a century after the second world war, we found that the very similar Bretton Woods regime did serve as a useful discipline. Now, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister acknowledged two weeks ago, our entry into the ERM can be seen as an

"extra discipline for keeping down inflation."—[*Official Report*, 30 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 888.]

However, it must be said that that practical conclusion has been achieved only at the cost of substantial damage to her Administration and, more serious still, to its inflation achievements.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby explained:

"The real tragedy is that we did not join the exchange rate mechanism . . . at least five years ago."

As he also made clear,

"That was not for want of trying."—[*Official Report*, 23 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 216.]

Indeed, the so-called Madrid conditions came into existence only after the then Chancellor and I, as Foreign Secretary, made it clear that we could not continue in office unless a specific commitment to join the ERM was made.

As the House will no doubt have observed, neither member of that particular partnership now remains in office. Our successor as Chancellor of the Exchequer has, during the past year, had to devote a great deal of his considerable talents to demonstrating exactly how those Madrid conditions have been attained, so as to make it possible to fulfil a commitment whose achievement has long been in the national interest.

It is now, alas, impossible to resist the conclusion that today's higher rates of inflation could well have been avoided had the question of ERM membership been properly considered and resolved at a much earlier stage. There are, I fear, developing grounds for similar anxiety over the handling—not just at and after the Rome summit—of the wider, much more open question of economic and monetary union.

Let me first make clear certain important points on which I have no disagreement with my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister. I do not regard the Delors report as some kind of sacred text that has to be accepted, or even rejected, on the nod. But it is an important working document. As I have often made plain, it is seriously deficient in significant respects.

I do not regard the Italian presidency's management of the Rome summit as a model of its kind—far from it. It was much the same, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will recall, in Milan some five years ago.

I do not regard it as in any sense wrong for Britain to make criticisms of that kind plainly and courteously, nor in any sense wrong for us to do so, if necessary, alone. As I have already made clear, I have, like the Prime Minister and other right hon. Friends, fought too many European battles in a minority of one to have any illusions on that score.

But it is crucially important that we should conduct those arguments upon the basis of a clear understanding of the true relationship between this country, the Community and our Community partners. And it is here, I fear, that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister increasingly risks leading herself and others astray in matters of substance as well as of style.

It was the late Lord Stockton, formerly Harold Macmillan, who first put the central point clearly. As long ago as 1962, he argued that we had to place and keep ourselves within the EC. He saw it as essential then, as it is today, not to cut ourselves off from the realities of

power; not to retreat into a ghetto of sentimentality about our past and so diminish our own control over our own destiny in the future.

The pity is that the Macmillan view had not been perceived more clearly a decade before in the 1950s. It would have spared us so many of the struggles of the last 20 years had we been in the Community from the outset; had we been ready, in the much too simple phrase, to "surrender some sovereignty" at a much earlier stage.

If we had been in from the start, as almost everybody now acknowledges, we should have had more, not less, influence over the Europe in which we live today. We should never forget the lesson of that isolation, of being on the outside looking in, for the conduct of today's affairs.

We have done best when we have seen the Community not as a static entity to be resisted and contained, but as an active process which we can shape, often decisively, provided that we allow ourselves to be fully engaged in it, with confidence, with enthusiasm and in good faith.

We must at all costs avoid presenting ourselves yet again with an over-simplified choice, a false antithesis, a bogus dilemma, between one alternative, starkly labelled "co-operation between independent sovereign states" and a second, equally crudely labelled alternative, "centralised, federal super-state", as if there were no middle way in between.

We commit a serious error if we think always in terms of "surrendering" sovereignty and seek to stand pat for all time on a given deal—by proclaiming, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister did two weeks ago, that we have "surrendered enough".

The European enterprise is not and should not be seen like that—as some kind of zero sum game. Sir Winston Churchill put it much more positively 40 years ago, when he said:

"It is also possible and not less agreeable to regard"

this sacrifice or merger of national sovereignty

"as the gradual assumption by all the nations concerned of that larger sovereignty which can alone protect their diverse and distinctive customs and characteristics and their national traditions."

I have to say that I find Winston Churchill's perception a good deal more convincing, and more encouraging for the interests of our nation, than the nightmare image sometimes conjured up by my right hon. Friend, who seems sometimes to look out upon a continent that is positively teeming with ill-intentioned people, scheming, in her words, to "extinguish democracy", to

"dissolve our national identities"

and to lead us

"through the back-door into a federal Europe".

What kind of vision is that for our business people, who trade there each day, for our financiers, who seek to make London the money capital of Europe or for all the young people of today?

These concerns are especially important as we approach the crucial topic of economic and monetary union. We must be positively and centrally involved in this debate and not fearfully and negatively detached. The costs of disengagement here could be very serious indeed.

There is talk, of course, of a single currency for Europe. I agree that there are many difficulties about the concept —both economic and political. Of course, as I said in my letter of resignation, none of us wants the imposition of a single currency. But that is not the real risk. The 11 others cannot impose their solution on the 12th country against its will, but they can go ahead without us. The risk is not imposition but isolation. The real threat is that of leaving ourselves with no say in the monetary arrangements that the rest of Europe chooses for itself, with Britain once again scrambling to join the club later, after the rules have been set and after the power has been distributed by others to our disadvantage. That would be the worst possible outcome.

It is to avoid just that outcome and to find a compromise both acceptable in the Government and sellable in Europe that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has put forward his hard ecu proposal. This lays careful emphasis on the possibility that the hard ecu as a common currency could, given time, evolve into a single currency. I have of course supported the hard ecu plan. But after Rome, and after the comments of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister two weeks ago, there is grave danger that the hard ecu proposal is becoming untenable, because two things have happened.

The first is that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has appeared to rule out from the start any compromise at any stage on any of the basic components that all the 11 other countries believe to be a part of EMU—a single currency or a permanently fixed exchange rate, a central bank or common monetary policy. Asked whether we would veto any arrangement that jeopardised the pound sterling, my right hon. Friend replied simply, "Yes." That statement means not that we can block EMU but that they can go ahead without us. Is that a position that is likely to ensure, as I put it in my resignation letter, that

"we hold, and retain, a position of influence in this vital debate"?

I fear not. Rather, to do so, we must, as I said, take care not to rule in or rule out any one solution absolutely. We must be seen to be part of the same negotiation.

The second thing that happened was, I fear, even more disturbing. Reporting to this House, my right hon. Friend almost casually remarked that she did not think that many people would want to use the hard ecu anyway—even as a common currency, let alone as a single one. It was remarkable—indeed, it was tragic—to hear my right hon. Friend dismissing, with such personalised incredulity, the very idea that the hard ecu proposal might find growing favour amoung the peoples of Europe, just as it was extraordinary to hear her assert that the whole idea of EMU might be open for consideration only by future generations. Those future generations are with us today.

How on earth are the Chancellor and the Governor of the Bank of England, commending the hard ecu as they strive to, to be taken as serious participants in the debate against that kind of background noise? I believe that both the Chancellor and the Governor are cricketing enthusiasts, so I hope that there is no monopoly of cricketing metaphors. It is rather like sending your opening batsmen to the crease only for them to find, the moment the first balls are bowled, that their bats have been broken before the game by the team captain.

The point was perhaps more sharply put by a British business man, trading in Brussels and elsewhere, who wrote to me last week, stating:

"People throughout Europe see our Prime Minister's finger-wagging and hear her passionate, 'No, No, No', much more clearly than the content of the carefully worded formal texts."

He went on:

"It is too easy for them to believe that we all share her attitudes; for why else has she been our Prime Minister for so long?"

[Sir Geoffrey Howe]

My correspondent concluded:

"This is a desperately serious situation for our country."

And sadly, I have to agree.

The tragedy is—and it is for me personally, for my party, for our whole people and for my right hon. Friend herself, a very real tragedy—that the Prime Minister's perceived attitude towards Europe is running increasingly serious risks for the future of our nation. It risks minimising our influence and maximising our chances of being once again shut out. We have paid heavily in the past for late starts and squandered opportunities in Europe. We dare not let that happen again. If we detach ourselves completely, as a party or a nation, from the middle ground of Europe, the effects will be incalculable and very hard ever to correct.

In my letter of resignation, which I tendered with the utmost sadness and dismay, I said:

"Cabinet Government is all about trying to persuade one another from within".

That was my commitment to Government by persuasion —persuading colleagues and the nation. I have tried to do that as Foreign Secretary and since, but I realise now that the task has become futile: trying to stretch the meaning of words beyond what was credible, and trying to pretend that there was a common policy when every step forward risked being subverted by some casual comment or impulsive answer.

The conflict of loyalty, of loyalty to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister—and, after all, in two decades together that instinct of loyalty is still very real—and of loyalty to what I perceive to be the true interests of the nation, has become all too great. I no longer believe it possible to resolve that conflict from within this Government. That is why I have resigned. In doing so, I have done what I believe to be right for my party and my country. The time has come for others to consider their own response to the tragic conflict of loyalties with which I have myself wrestled for perhaps too long.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[FIFTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [7 November].

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign, We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Younger.]*.

Question again proposed.

Education and Training

Mr. Speaker: I must announce that I have selected the first amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition and that furthermore today, because of the large number of right hon. and hon. Members who wish to participate in the debate, I propose to put a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 pm and 9 pm. I should have liked to put the limit on somewhat earlier, but we have two maiden speeches today and that would have been unnecessarily harsh and perhaps unfair to those hon. Members. Therefore, I ask hon. Members who are called before 7 pm to bear it in mind that I should be most grateful and the whole House would applaud them if they could keep their speeches to approximately 10 minutes in length.

4.38 pm

Mr. Jack Straw (Blackburn): I beg to move, at the end of the Question, to add:

But humbly note the increasing anxiety of parents and employers that the education and training policies of Her Majesty's Government have seriously undermined choice and opportunity and placed standards at risk; express anxiety and concern that Britain's investment and achievement in education and training is leaving the country further behind its major European and other competitors; condemn Her Majesty's Government for its incompetence towards, and mismanagement of, the education service and its profound failure to fulfil its proper and necessary role in improving and upgrading the skills base of the nation; and believe that standards will only be raised and opportunities increased by a change of administration to a government committed to serious investment in the nation's future.

It is customary to congratulate a new Secretary of State on his appointment to office, and that I do. The presence of a new Secretary of State at the Dispatch Box results from the deep political crisis that faces this broken-backed Administration. It is not only a crisis about the future role of Britain in Europe but a crisis of confidence in the Government's ability—indeed, their inability—to provide the standards of education and training enjoyed by our major competitors in Europe and beyond. Never has public anxiety about the state of Britain's education system been greater. Never has public confidence in the Government's ability to deliver a decent standard of education been lower.

In last week's Gallup poll in *The Daily Telegraph*, 82 per cent. of respondents said that Britain was not giving

enough attention to education; 73 per cent. believed that the quality of education in Britain was declining. When asked who was to blame, just 10 per cent. blamed the Government's usual scapegoat, the local education authorities; 4 per cent. blamed the teachers' unions and 68 per cent. blamed the Government. So much for the Prime Minister's claim in February:

"The education service is in better shape than it has ever been."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 1990; Vol. 166, c. 757.]

If the Government had set out on a deliberate strategy to ensure that Britain fell further and further behind its major competitors in education and training, they could hardly have done better. In the early and mid-1980s, the Government undermined the foundations of the education service by deep cuts in spending and continuous abuse of the teaching profession. Then the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) put intolerable pressures on the system by imposing contentious and ill-conceived changes on all schools without consultation.

Then came the previous Secretary of State for Education and Science, who is now the Leader of the House. I believe that he recognised the damage and havoc caused by his predecessor, but he lacked the political clout to do much about it and was consistently and publicly undermined and humiliated by Downing street, the chairman of the Conservative party and central office. So now we have the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). The man who, at the Department of Health, increased hospital waiting lists, closed wards and alienated health workers and patients alike is now to be responsible for the education of our children. How long will it be before the Secretary of State who derided professional ambulance personnel as mere drivers calls professional and highly trained teachers just minders?

The Secretary of State may be new to the Department of Education and Science, but he is not new to Conservative education policy. In his speech 17 months ago he proudly admitted part authorship of the education section of the Government's 1987 manifesto. In that speech he claimed that in education and health the Government were not

"opposed by left or right"

and that the only opposition to the Government's education policies were

"the forces of pure reaction and the resistance to change of the trades unions—the middle class and professional trade unions in particular—who represent the deliverers of the service . . . the teachers."

He concluded in a spectacular passage:

"The National Union of Teachers and the National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers are now looking like powerless spectators as Kenneth Baker's reforms sweep on past them to mounting public approval."

Even as the Secretary of State spoke, what little public approval had existed for the promise of the Baker reforms evaporated as their desperate practice dawned. It even dawned on many Conservative associations. In a resolution the Conservative association of Doncaster, North complained of

"the manifest failure of the Baker education reforms to improve standards of learning."

The simple truth is that after 11 years the Government's education policies have collapsed.

The Government lack ambition for the nation's children and have failed to provide the leadership, funding and effective management which the education and training services so desperately need.

Mr. Andrew Rowe (Mid-Kent): I must admit that I do not know what goes on in Doncaster. However, I have made a wide-ranging tour particularly of the primary schools in my constituency. The heads of those primary schools are almost unanimous in their approval of the recent changes to the system under which they have to operate.

Mr. Straw: I can only say to the hon. Gentleman that his experience is not that of almost any other head teacher in the country. Nor is it the experience of the chairman of the Kent education committee who recently wrote to parents condemning the Government's proposals for

The Government's lack of ambition is shown most emphatically by their failure during 11 years significantly to increase the proportion of young people aged between 16 and 19 in full-time education and high-quality training.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a moment.

Recent figures from the DES show that, at 35 per cent., the proportion of young people staying on at 17 in Britain is lower than in any of our major competitors—half the rate of most.

"What an incredible disregard of human potential to accept that 60 per cent. of our children leave school at 16 while in our competitor countries that number is 10 per cent. or less."

So said Peter Morgan, the director general of the Institute of Directors, earlier this year.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I shall give way in a moment.

There is no strategy to tackle that disregard of human potential, only ministerial confusion and contradiction. The former Secretary of State for Employment, the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), said in his speech last December that on behalf of the Government he would set stretching targets under which by 1992—just two years away—the number of young people obtaining the equivalent of five O-levels or GCSEs grades A to C would be doubled to more than two thirds, and that in three years 25 per cent. of our young people should reach the national vocational qualification level 3, equivalent to two A-levels or more.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I have told the hon. Lady that I shall give way in a moment.

That was the promise made by the Secretary of State on behalf of the Government. Within four weeks, he had left the Government, and every word that he said in that speech was repudiated by the Prime Minister and his successor.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Lady does not sit down, I shall not give way to her. I have told her that I shall give way. She must simply wait her turn.

What the right hon. Gentleman said should be stretching targets were totally repudiated by the Prime Minister in a letter to my right hon. Friend the Leader of

[Mr. Straw]

the Opposition. She said that those stretching targets could not be "specific Government targets." The whole policy was simply dumped within four weeks of being formulated. In contrast to the shambles of the Government, Labour will set targets and those targets will be achievable. They will have the support of both sides of industry.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: The hon. Gentleman referred to opted-out schools. I have two of those in my constituency and they are doing exceedingly well. The first has already appointed four extra members of staff and is about to appoint two more. The schools have been given 25 per cent. more cash in every subject department for equipment. They are managing their affairs infinitely better than Lancashire county council did on their behalf. We now hope that others will follow their excellent example.

Mr. Straw: I shall deal with the detail of opting-out policy later, but the hon. Lady should know that opted-out schools have had more money because of the deliberate fiddling of the formulae. Opted-out schools are being bribed and given extra cash, for which the ratepayers and poll tax payers of Lancashire have to fork out.

The Government's lack of ambition is also shown in nursery education. Britain has the lowest pre-school and child care provision of any of our major competitors and the Government have no strategy whatever for tackling it. In many Conservative areas, there is no choice or opportunity for nursery education for thousands of children, because there are insufficient nursery schools or nursery classes. In contrast to the Government, Labour will ensure that the Prime Minister's pledge of 1972 of nursery education for all is turned into a reality.

Good leadership requires clarity, consistency and consent, but the education service has had none of them. Instead, it has been subjected to a lurch in one direction and a retreat in another. The right hon. Member for Mole Valley was told by everyone who knew anything about education that an inflexible, 10-subject national curriculum and associated testing would not work. Reality dawned on his successor. He set about a retreat, but it was never clear where that retreat would take him.

As a result we got decision-making on the hoof, with different Ministers saying different things. In a speech in July, the former Secretary of State announced one series of so-called solutions to the problems left by his predecessor. Then up popped the new Minister of State, anxious for a headline, with another prescription. On 30 October he told *The Daily Telegraph* that the Government were planning

"radical changes in secondary schools to allow less academic children to concentrate on vocational education from 14."

It is not remotely clear whether that is to be the start of a great new reform along West German lines, some variant of the French system or, as I suspect, the introduction by the back door of a grammar stream to an unreformed A-level, and a secondary modern stream for the rest.

The chaos in the curriculum before 16 is replicated post-16. The reform of education and training opportunities beyond 16 is of profound importance to the creation of real choice for young people and to secure the skills base of the economy. The present range of vocational qualifications and courses is, as the senior chief inspector of schools put it,

"a jungle in which talent and opportunity are lost",

while A-levels as an examination are outdated and outmoded.

The argument is, indeed, about standards. A-levels cause pointless over-specialisation which leads to the under-education of each generation, especially in science and technology. A-levels are even failing on their own terms. The number of entrants for A-levels in physics and mathematics, for example, has declined markedly. This country cannot possibly compete until the jungle at 16-plus is sorted out, as Labour has proposed. Everyone bar the Government knows that. There is no coherence from the Government, just confusion.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): What the hon. Gentleman has said is extremely serious. The country will want to know now what alternatives he proposes to A-levels. He cannot undermine A-levels, which are valuable to a great many pupils, without proposing alternatives. That should be done in the same breath.

Mr. Straw: If the hon. Gentleman had waited, both would have been almost in the same breath. He knows as well as anybody that we have spoken a thousand times and published documents about our alternatives to A-levels and the reform of 16-plus education. Everyone bar the Government knows that there must be changes to 16-plus examinations.

In 1988 the Government established a committee, under the chairmanship of Professor Higginson, with the remit to reform A-levels. Two weeks before it published its report, the members of that committee were privately told that the Government would accept their recommendations for a sensible system of a five-subject, slimmer but no less rigorous A-level qualification. Two weeks later, the report was publicly rejected as a result of a prime ministerial veto of the wishes of the previous Secretary of State. It is not just on European policy that Downing street disrupts Cabinet government. It is on educational policy and in many other areas. Two years were then wasted as various groups tried to salvage something from the mess. A-levels, AS-levels and some core skills were to be combined.

In the summer, near-anarchy broke out on the ministerial corridor at the DES. The Secretary of State went on holiday, leaving the shop to the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon). On 17 August *The Independent* announced:

"Minister rules out A-level changes."

There were to be no changes to A-levels and no five-subject examination. Then the Under-Secretary went on holiday and the Secretary of State returned.

"MacGregor hints at big A-level changes",

he announced to *The Independent* on 11 September. He continued:

"Major changes might be needed to A-levels to increase the number of pupils staying on."

The Secretary of State was summoned to Downing street. The Under-Secretary of State returned from holiday, started up the war of words against his Secretary of State, attacked his advisory body and accused those who want reform of having been "hijacked" by progressive elements.

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): Be serious.

Mr. Straw: I am serious.

The Government's indecision, chaos and failure of leadership is beyond belief. The shambles is all too characteristic of a Government who treat the education service like a plaything and experiment with the education of other people's children as though they were animals in some laboratory. What kind of lead can be given when the service has had three Secretaries of State in 15 months and when not one of the present ministerial team has held his present job for longer than four months?

There is similar incoherence on the critical issue of vouchers—the scheme by which the Conservative party would end free state education. The Under-Secretary of State is a member of the No Turning Back group of right-wing Tory Members of Parliament. Eight weeks ago, the group published from Conservative central office a pamphlet calling for vouchers. As we well know, the Prime Minister said at the Conservative party conference that she hoped that the training voucher scheme

"would not be the last".

As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition mentioned just an hour and a half ago, the Secretary of State takes a different view. On television at the weekend he said emphatically of vouchers:

"I don't think they play any part in the Government's plans."

I do not know whether he was present for the exchange between my right hon. Friend and the Prime Minister, but when the Prime Minister was asked three times whether she endorsed those words, she three times denied her Secretary of State.

I offer him this chance to intervene in my speech. Will he tell us not what he thinks but what he knows about whether vouchers will play any part in the Government's plans? Will vouchers be in the next Conservative manifesto? Does he have the Prime Minister's approval of his answer?

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): Plainly they will not. As my right hon. Friend and I have explained frequently, we have set out to achieve choice and money following the pupil. We have done that by open enrolment, local management of schools and the formula allocation of funds to children who go to those schools. As a result, all the aims pursued by those who advocated vouchers are being achieved by our present reforms. The idea of vouchers for schools is not on the Government's agenda,. It need not be and will not be on the agenda, because we have found a better way of pursuing those highly desirable objectives.

Mr. Straw: I am glad to have that categorical undertaking. It begs the questions why the Prime Minister did not say so and where it leaves the Under-Secretary of State, who does not remotely take that view. The No Turning Back group has written a pamphlet proposing the extension of the education voucher system to all parents.

The Government have shown a fundamental lack of ambition and a failure of leadership, alongside a failure to provide funding and management. When the Secretary of State comes to the Dispatch Box, he will probably tell us what a priority education spending has been for the Government. Since 1979, the Government have allowed the share of national income spent on education and science to fall by one eighth, from 5·5 per cent. in 1979 to 4·8 per cent. last year, which is equal to £3·5 billion at today's prices. The Secretary of State has been muttering that national income has increased. If so, why could not education have enjoyed an increased share of it, instead of its being flung away in tax cuts for the rich?

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Under the Labour Government, when national income was not rising so quickly, the proportion of gross domestic product spent on education fell. The records of the two Governments show that we have given higher priority to education in our spending plans, and we continue to do so. The success of our economic policies has enabled us to increase spending in real terms per pupil by almost half as much again.

Mr. Straw: That is simply not correct. The Secretary of State knows that the proportion of spending under the Labour Government rose, and that under the Labour Government previous to that, for the first time education took a greater share of the budget than defence. If the Secretary of State is so proud of the Government's record, perhaps he could explain why teachers have had to suffer real cuts in pay for each of the past three years. Why, since 1979, has the central Government share of educational spending been cut by more than a quarter in real terms?

Why will the latest poll tax settlement mean enforced cuts in education budgets in areas such as Avon, where the local Conservatives are pushing for a £10 million cuts package for next year?

The figures in last week's autumn statement for current spending will not even make good the 10 per cent. inflation with which local authorities have had to cope. As to capital spending, there is a £4 billion backlog of repairs and renewals. The Government's latest allocation means that urgent schemes will be put off yet again, and that pupils must continue to receive their education in crumbling schools. Last week's allocation is less in real terms than that made by the Labour Government in 1979. As a result of that measly allocation, in the summer the former Secretary of State banned church schools even from applying for money to build nursery classes, and suddenly announced that school building regulations passed by the House in July 1981 and due to be enforced next year were to be deferred for another five years.

Those regulations are of great importance, as they lay down minimum standards for teaching areas for junior and middle schools and for sixth forms, and stipulate better changing accommodation for all schools, and separate recreation and play areas for nursery children. When those regulations were introduced, the then Under-Secretary of State for Education and Science, the right hon. Member for Brent, North (Sir R. Boyson), said:

"it is intended that in 10 years"—

that is, next year—

"all schools should be under the minimum regulations."—[*Official Report, Fourth Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments*, 28 July 1981; c. 21.]

They will not, because 10 years of accumulated neglect by the Government will mean, on the Government's own admission, that millions of children will continue to receive their education in substandard accommodation.

The Secretary of State referred to local management. It has become a terrible embarrassment for the Government, and in a characteristic effort to pass the buck, Ministers spent the summer claiming that wicked local education authorities have withheld thousands of pounds that should have been delegated to schools' budgets. Today's *Daily Mail* carries three pages of complaints about the red tape that is strangling our schools, the scandal of missing

[Mr. Straw]

teachers, the growing army of bureaucrats who do not teach even one child, and the fact that the number of non-classroom teachers has doubled in eight years.

The *Daily Mail* quotes the Secretary of State as saying:

"The Daily Mail has done a service to education by exposing this burgeoning bureaucracy."

The right hon. and learned Gentleman would be well advised in future to look before he fires, for by making that comment, he has shot his foot off. The number of non-classroom teachers has increased, but does the Secretary of State understand why, and who is responsible? That increase is the direct result of Government policies. Through the education support grant and training grant schemes, the Government are paying local authorities for non-classroom teachers to provide training in the national curriculum and testing, and to support all the other Government programmes.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well that his explanation does not excuse the disparity between the different local education authorities cited by the *Daily Mail*. Is he really leaping to the defence of bureaucracies such as that in Newcastle upon Tyne, where the proportion of non-teaching, non-classroom staff at 54 per cent. exceeds that of classroom teachers? If the hon. Gentleman will examine the league table in the *Daily Mail*, he will discover that Labour councils in particular spend more on bureaucracy than they do on their classrooms, which is the Labour party's consistent approach to public services.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State should also examine his Department. Bureaucracy has increased over the past three or four years because of the massive growth in the demands made on the education service by Government policies. The number of civil servants in the Secretary of State's Department has increased by 131 over the past three years, and the number of inspectors has risen by 22 per cent., to cope with the unrealistic demands on it.

Labour-controlled Lancashire county council says:

"We have checked the position in the summer term. We had 70 advisory teachers, 59 of whom are funded by programmes initiated and paid for by central Government, mainly the education support grant programme."

Where non-classroom teachers in the *Daily Mail* survey are not paid by central Government, many are supply teachers used to cover vacancies caused by teacher shortages which have in turn been created by Government policies.

I will explain to the Secretary of State why many Labour authorities have a higher proportion of non-teaching staff. It is because those authorities run nursery schools, which use a high proportion of such staff, including nursery nurses. Increasingly in Labour-controlled areas, nursery nurses are used in reception classes, to release primary school teachers to train in running the Government's national curriculum and assessment system. Labour areas also provide school meals services, which need people to run them.

The level of holdback has been endorsed by every Education Minister in respect of all education authorities. It was endorsed by the former Secretary of State and by the right hon. and learned Gentleman's new colleagues. The Government complain that one authority has a percentage holdback of X, and another of Y—but the Government approved that power being given to local authorities. Holdback is higher in some authorities than in others because they have done what the Government asked in respect of competitive tendering for cleaning and catering services, and the proportion of holdback greatly increases in those cases.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: The hon. Gentleman dodged all my questions about comparisons. The city having the highest proportion of non-classroom staff is Newcastle upon Tyne, and the city having the lowest is Leeds. Both are Labour-controlled. The same variations occur in the percentage holdback for local management of schools. It betrays the hon. Gentleman's real instincts to leap to the defence of authorities that are employing most people away from the classroom, and who are holding back a bigger proportion of their budget. He defends bureaucracy rather than classroom spending.

Mr. Straw: I do not defend bureaucracy, and the Secretary of State has every reason to know that. We did not create the massive bureaucracy in town and country reorganisation: the Government did, by making repeated changes. Can the Secretary of State imagine the extent of the chaos created in an education dept by all the changes, made one after the other, to the national curriculum? Does he not appreciate that the reorganisation of local schools management—which may achieve in the long run a reduction in the number employed in the town halls and country halls—is bound to impose greater pressure initially? The Government circular acknowledges with one voice that it will mean an increase in the number of so-called bureaucrats about whom the Secretary of State complains.

As to the variations, I believe in local democracy and that different boroughs should have the right to determine how much is spent on their local education service, and to sort out that matter with their own electors. That is for local authorities, not central Government.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Will the hon. Gentleman allow me to intervene on that point?

Mr. Straw: No. Many other hon. Members want to speak, and I have already given way several times.

Mr. Dunn *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) has made it clear that he will not give way.

Mr. Straw: Not only is the whole education system short of money, but the Government have squandered money on irrelevant and doctrinaire projects that have mocked the needs of the 93 per cent. of children in the maintained sector. I refer to policies such as the assisted places scheme, opting out and city technology colleges. The worst favour that the right hon. Member for Mole Valley did for his party's supporters in Bradford was to site a city technology college in that city.

Mr. Dunn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Straw: No. I have already given way six times, and many other hon. Members want to speak. The hon. Gentleman knows that I am usually generous in allowing interventions.

Mr. Dunn *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn) must not persist when the hon. Gentleman who has the floor has made it clear that he does not want to give way.

Mr. Straw: Twelve days ago, the former Secretary of State said on television, that he could not understand why there is such opposition in Bradford to a city technology college. As I watched him on television, I was struck by the fact that he genuinely did not understand. Had he done so, he would never have agreed to the official opening of the CTC just a week before polling day in Bradford, North. The teachers and parents of Killingholme first school in Bradford understand why the children are housed in temporary buildings, and so do those not far away at St. Augustine's Church of England school—I visited it last week—where the ceiling has fallen down and the school has therefore closed. They understand that, had it not been for the £7 million squandered on the CTC, their schools would have been renewed. There would still be £4 million left to spend on other crumbling schools in Bradford.

Opting out has palpably failed as a policy. It is known that Ministers do not want it to succeed. On 13 October, the then Secretary of State was reported in the *Financial Times* as believing that

"if a majority of the nation's schools did opt out, the result could be an administrative nightmare for central government, which would have to supervise and fund thousands of schools."

The failure has been so complete that that Secretary of State abandoned categorical pledges that he and his predecessor had given to the effect that opt-out schools would be treated no better financially than were LEA schools. Instead, at the Conservative party conference, the right hon. Gentleman brazenly announced a series of bribes for schools that left a local education authority. How can that bribery possibly be squared with the repeated undertaking made by one Secretary of State after another that there would be no difference between the financial treatment of local education authority and of opt-out schools?

Although opting out has failed, it has paralysed the ability of LEAs to do what the Government say they want —to remove surplus places. The number of surplus places has shot up to more than 1,700,000, while the number of places removed by statutory closures in this Parliament is running at half the level achieved in the previous Parliament. The cost of that waste is at least £360 million. That money has been deliberately denied to our children while Ministers seek cynically to trap LEAs into naming schools for closure. The aim of the policy is not to improve the efficiency of the service, but to trigger opting out. Similar perverted priorities have been followed in higher education.

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman referred to the importance of good education and said that that required clarity and consent. Does he agree that grant-maintained schools represent clarity and consent? It is necessary to have a ballot before opting out. What greater consent can one have than that? Will he give a commitment from the Dispatch Box that he will not abolish grant-maintained schools in the event of Labour coming into office?

Mr. Straw: I am delighted to tell the hon. Gentleman that, on taking office, one of the first steps of the Labour Government will be to take opt-out schools back into the local community and the LEAs. I am glad to say that that policy has the full support of the Conservative chairman of education on Kent county council.

Mr. Dunn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: No.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Will he give a further commitment that CTCs will also be taken back into LEA control?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as he has given me a chance to find the letter written by the Conservative chairman of Kent education committee, Mr. Ronnie Norman, who has protested about the evils of opting out. In a letter to the parents of those attending Wilmington grammar school for boys, he opposed opting out, and the argument that he advanced is exactly the same as ours. He stated:

"We also want our schools to be open to the whole community and to be part of it. Schools which opt-out frustrate these aims."

That argument applies to opt-out schools as well as to CTCs. Contrary to what the Prime Minister said, we will not close the CTCs or opt-out schools, but we shall bring them back into the local community through the LEAs.

Mr. Dunn *rose*——

Mr. Straw: No, I shall not give way.

Mr. Jacques Arnold (Gravesham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman referred to a school in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Mr. Dunn). Would not it be in order, or at least good manners, for him to give way to my hon. Friend?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is a matter for the hon. Member for Blackburn. I remind all hon. Members that a large number of Members want to take part in this debate.

Mr. Straw: The deliberate disruption practised by Conservative Members simply reduces their chances of participating.

The Government have also followed perverted priorities when it comes to higher education. The former Secretary of State but one announced plans in January 1989 to expand higher education, but without announcing plans for paying for it. Meanwhile, hundreds of millions of extra pounds have been allocated to the student loans scheme, which has managed to impoverish students in need while costing the taxpayer much more than the grant system that it is designed to replace. What has happened? The loan scheme is another embarrassing failure, with fewer than one student in 25 taking a loan while the administrative costs of the scheme rocket. At the same time, the university funding system has all but collapsed and one university after another is now forced to announce the imposition of top-up tuition fees.

I hope that the new Secretary of State will tell us whether it is Government policy that we should abandon the central principle of free tuition in higher education. Are students on normal undergraduate courses expected to pay additional top-up tuitional fees?

Overall, the Government's record is one of incompetence on an unbelievable scale——

Mr. Dunn *rose*——

Mr. Straw: I have already explained to the hon. Gentleman that I shall not give way.

The Government's record is marked by no ambition, no leadership, inadequate funding and wholly ineffective management. The prime duty of the Secretary of State is to manage sensibly those 400,000 people, teachers, on whom the quality of education depends.

Mr. Dunn *rose*——

Mr. Straw: In place of management——

Mr. Dunn *rose*——

Mr. Straw: Are you going to do anything about this, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

In place of management, we have had nothing but complacency and abuse. The Government are totally complacent about the shortage of teachers. The previous Secretary of State told the House on 24 January:

> "There is no evidence that teacher shortages are dramatically worse than they were in previous years or that we are facing a nationwide crisis."—[*Official Report*, 24 January 1990; Vol. 165, c. 917.]

However, the Government cannot guarantee that pupils will not be sent home because of a shortage of teachers.

The Government cannot even introduce, as we would, a national system of teacher appraisal, because that would require the full-time equivalent of about 1,800 additional teachers. The new Secretary of State has got off to a typical start. Faced by a detailed, carefully researched survey published last week which reveals that teacher shortages have yet again increased, his response was as ignorant and aggressive as ever. He accused the six teacher associations that published the report of being alarmist and he said that it was ludicrous to include in the definition of a vacancy those covered by supply teachers.

The only ludicrous thing about that remark was that the Secretary of State should make it. Has he any idea what can happen to a class of children when they have no permanent teacher and when they are taught by a succession of teachers? It is completely different for children to have a succession of supply teachers rather than one permanent teacher.

The Minister of State, Department of Education and Science (Mr. Tim Eggar): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that his party does not support giving maternity leave to teachers? The supply teachers who cover maternity leave were counted by the unions as being equivalent to temporary vacancies.

Mr. Straw: We do not propose to restrict maternity leave, but when the Minister was at the Department of Employment he resisted any extension of that leave under the social charter or any other measure—*[Interruption.]* The fact that we have a major shortage of teachers is no laughing matter. The vast majority of long-term supply teachers are covering permanent post vacancies. it was entirely legitimate for the teacher associations to include in the definition of a permanent post one that is not filled by a permanent teacher.

The great error of the Conservative party is to believe that the creation of some sort of market in education can be a substitute for the proper management of the service. The Queen's Speech includes a Bill to restore teachers' pay bargaining rights. That restoration is long overdue, since the imposition by diktat of pay rises denied teachers their fundamental trade union rights and greatly worsened morale.

The Bill will include proposals to break up national pay bargaining by allowing local education authorities, such as Westminster and Wandsworth, and grant-maintained schools, to opt out of national negotiations—to asset-strip experienced teachers from neighbouring schools and from local authorities with no funds to enhance teacher salaries.

Will the Secretary of State explain how that would improve the management of the service and the quality of education for each child? Perhaps he will explain how this shambles which passes for a policy—these market mechanisms—will do something to increase the choice and opportunity of the one third of children—according to Her Majesty's senior chief inspector of schools, over 2 million children—who are getting a raw deal at school.

What proposals does the Secretary of State have to match our proposals to reorganise the education inspectorate nationally and locally, to establish an independent education standards council, to ensure that choice and opportunity have a reality beyond their mouthing by Conservative politicians, and to ensure that every child is guaranteed the best education that the country can offer?

In education and training, as in so much else, the Conservatives have failed. The quicker the Government leave office the better for our nation and our young people. In their place will be a Labour Government with the clear ambition to make Britain the best educated and trained nation in Europe. With the policies to make that ambition a reality, that Labour Government will be determined to invest in the only resources on which we can rely—the skills and talents of our people.

5.21 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Science (Mr. Kenneth Clarke): I come to my new office determined to produce improvements in the state education service of this country. I am as dedicated to the pursuit of high standards in state schools as I was completely wedded to the creation of a better national health service.

The aim of the whole Government in their third term has been to deliver a great programme of improvement in our public services. We will deliver that programme, particularly in the key areas of health and education, so that future generations will have a better NHS and better schools. The Prime Minister, the present chairman of the party, the present Leader of the House and several others have all had a hand in our education reforms. I was on the policy group chaired by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) that looked at our manifesto on education before the last election. Shortly afterwards, I found myself Secretary of State for Health.

A deal of controversy has surrounded both fields since the last election, as one can appreciate, since the prospect of change causes concern in any large organisation and it is easy to arouse fears among people working in services when one is embarking on such changes of culture and objectives. But the present situation is different. The present Secretary of State for Health, my successor in that office, and I find ourselves past the worst of the controversy and the pain of the debate in both services. We

are charged with the steady bringing into practice of the reforms and the delivery of the main benefits for pupils, parents, patients and the public.

Modernising and improving British education means giving the public more choice, with which the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) agreed today, and giving them more influence over how their children are taught. It means setting standards and then measuring the success of the pupils who achieve them.

It means restoring the morale and self-esteem of the teaching profession by mapping our clearly the sensible curriculum that they should teach and the testing of their pupils' achievements as they progress through that curriculum. It means the delegation of responsibilities so that the management of each school is in the hands of the governors, head teachers and staff who can account directly to the parents for the achievements of that school.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I will give way to the hon. Lady shortly.

It means dismantling bureaucratic barriers, not defending—in the way that the hon. Member for Blackburn did—those barriers against parental choice so that popular schools can admit pupils to fill all the available places.

We all realise the background, and I believe that we share many of the aims, although they are more clearly and coherently presented and addressed by Conservative Members. As we know, the background to it all is the fact that the state education system, to which we are committed on both sides of the House, has been in danger of losing the confidence of the public.

Rightly or wrongly, many parents undoubtedly feel that the standards of education that their children are getting are not as good as they used to be or as they should be. The public are suspicious of new teaching methods and of today's systems of examination and grading. Some fear that, at worse, too many children are still leaving school who cannot express themselves clearly, who cannot read or write adequately, who cannot count and who behave in an anti-social fashion. That is the problem that the public ask us to address.

It is almost impossible to measure accurately, and to everybody's satisfaction, whether standards generally have been rising or declining. But everyone is, or should be, agreed that standards of education and training in Britain must be raised to higher levels than they have ever been in the past. Tomorrow's world will require Britain to give much higher real priority to education and training than ever before. We must give better quality teaching and training to our children and young people to prepare them for jobs and to be citizens in a more attractive society.

The Opposition amendment catches the flavour of that public concern and then makes the absurd proposition that a return to a Labour Administration will satisfy public expectations. In education, apparently, we and the public are asked to believe that the party that abolished, for example, direct grant schools is now committed to quality and achievement. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I hear Labour Members chanting, "Hear, hear," but the Labour and trade union movement has for years been closely identified with less formal teaching methods, all ability classes and attacks on academic standards, which they usually describe as elitist and divisive. That has been the whole ethos of the Labour party for years on this subject.

I would guess that half the present Members of the House of Commons, including myself, are 11-plus products of the former system of education. The Labour party set about changing education in the 1960s and 1970s in such a way that they destroyed most of the opportunities that the 1944 Act had opened up for working-class children in Britain.

Mr. Richard Tracy (Surbiton): At the heart of the whole argument about standards is the fact that about two thirds of education authorities are controlled by Labour. In other words, when the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) say that a future Labour Government would lift standards, he means that that Government would achieve the same standards as are being reached by authorities currently controlled by his party, and they are low standards by any measurement. They are bumping along at the bottom of the league.

Mr. Clarke: One could make an extremely good base for saying that, on average, Labour-controlled local education authorities achieve lower standards than Conservative-controlled authorities. That is in part because they often draw from different populations, but it is not the complete explanation. It was not even the one chosen by the hon. Member for Blackburn. The hon. Gentleman criticised central Government on standards, and he then leaped to the defence of local government by, for example, defending their right to spend the majority of their budgets outside the classroom on advisers and staff at headquarters; and he defended their right to withhold immensely high proportions of their budgets from the local management of schools to provide for central costs. That approach, combined with the traditional ethic of the Labour party—the traditional belief in attacking academic standards—explains a great deal of where we are at present in education.

Ms. Gordon: The right hon. and learned Gentleman's fine words about freedom and choice are all very well, but what does he intend to do for Tower Hamlets—where people are unable to pay the poll tax—to provide us with more money? About 160 children there—the number would probably be as high as 300 if we could discover all those who have not been registered—have no school places. What will he do to ensure that places are provided for them and that money is made available to meet the rapidly increasing birth rate and the influx of children from refugee families?

Mr. Clarke: I am told that Tower Hamlets has received extra money to cover its rising rolls. Further, all local government is benefiting from the settlement, announced recently, which has greatly increased the standard spending assessment for schools way ahead of inflation, a subject to which I shall return.

We espouse the same views, have the same commitment to the public education system and believe in choice and higher standards, but the hon. Member for Blackburn sets about it in a different way, as I have said. Incidentally, I am grateful to him for his welcome to me in my post and for his courtesy in giving way to me frequently during his speech. He was not so friendly when I was first appointed. Always a man of fashionable opinions, he did not seem to

[Mr. Clarke]

know that Rottweiler jokes had gone out of fashion—better that than being the poodle of the National Union of Teachers, which he is likely to become if the Labour party gets into office. He is a parlour socialist in the tradition of Shirley Williams and others, who have done more to damage educational standards in this country recently than most other groups of people.

Mr. Dunn: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Clarke: I shall in a moment.

If we take the sentiments of the hon. Member for Blackburn at face value, it seems that he has perhaps changed. It he changing the Labour party's tradition? The amendment says that he and his right hon. Friends are committed to

"serious investment in the nation's future."

That is all that the amendment says about policy. It is designed to give the totally false impression that he is committed to spending more money on state education—but he is not. The Labour party has made two hugely expensive promises on child benefit and retirement pensions. Its Treasury spokesmen have made it clear that there is no commitment to any spending promises in any other sector.

Last week, we had the autumn statement, often best described as the real Budget, it comes before the House to announce the public spending round. Last week, it announced a 16 per cent. increase in standard spending assessments for schools and 10·5 per cent. more central expenditure on higher education—real-terms increases, ahead of inflation, of 10 per cent. and 4·5 per cent. respectively. The Labour party could not outbid that, and to be fair to it, it did not seriously attack the public spending settlement for education or health.

I read an account of an interview that the hon. Member for Blackburn gave Brian Walden. When questioned about how much he would spend on education, I hate to say it, but the hon. Gentleman was reduced to incoherent waffle. He is usually quite lucid, but he sounded on this occasion like the Leader of the Opposition on the subject of Labour's policy towards Europe. It was quite impossible to follow what he was trying to say. He was evading the fact that he knew that he was not in a position to promise more money. However, the problem is not only money.

During one section of the Walden interview, the hon. Gentleman tried to get away from the fact that he was not promising to spend more on education, although the Labour party likes to imply that it would, as we see in the amendment. He said, and I agree:

"I think the most challenging issue in education is not so much the issue of resources but how you manage the service and if I have one overwhelming criticism of the government it is for their incompetence in monitoring and managing the service."

I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman will manage. Given his remarks on expenditure on central costs of local government, I do not think that management is his strong suit. If the House will allow me one final comparison, he takes the same approach to education as the hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook) took when speaking on health. The hon. Member for Blackburn cannot promise to spend more public money because our record is not outbiddable with any credibility, and he does not have any original policy of his own on how to maximise choice and raise standards with the extra resources that we are putting in.

I now give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Dunn: I thought for a moment that I was invisible today.

The Labour party has attempted to steal our clothes by talking about consumer choice and raising standards. How can choice be improved and standards raised with a commitment to take CTCs and grant-maintained schools under local authority control and abolish grammar schools? I would have said to the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), had he not been so churlish and refused to let me intervene, that the Labour party is not prepared to place on record the fact that it will close down the grammar schools in Dartford and other parts of the country.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to my hon. Friend—as usual, I need a haircut, and the eyes in the back of my head are not working with their usual accuracy. My hon. Friend has caused more problems for the Labour party.

The speech of the hon. Member for Blackburn began with references to more choice and vague commitments, given with great solemnity, of how grant-maintained schools and city technology colleges would be taken back into the local community. What the devil does that mean? It is about as meaningful as what the Leader of the Opposition says in his more evasive moments. We know that it means that the hon. Gentleman would put such schools back under the control of local authorities and their bureaucracy. A great failing of British public service is that it is smothered in bureaucracy, most of it created by the Labour party in local town halls and defended by it.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, and then, as I have accepted several interventions, I shall try to make more progress.

Mr. Hughes: I am grateful to the Secretary of State and, by definition, I hold no brief for the Labour party.

Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman explain how his Government, at one and the same time, spend £10 million on a city technology college in a borough such as mine—a private sector-supported enterprise with limited entry—while the local education authority, which happens to be Labour, suffers a £7 million cut in education and the hospital schools in Guy's, the Bethlem royal hospital and the Maudsley hospital are at risk because there is no local authority funding for them? How can that be described as the commitment to state education with which he opened his speech?

Mr. Clarke: Expenditure on state education is rising rapidly, and pupil numbers are dropping.

Mr. Straw: They are not dropping.

Mr. Clarke: They have dropped over the decade, and the standard spending assessment has risen 16 per cent., 10 per cent. ahead of inflation. We are not cutting back on state schools to make way for the CTCs. They are drawing in a great deal of private sector support from the business

community that wants to help us raise standards in schools and place in our state education system, schools that are attractive to parents and teachers.

We hope that the generality of state education will respond to the incentive and example of good practice where it is achieved in the city technology colleges, which is already happening. Some £40 million-worth of private investment is being brought into state education by the city technology college system.

With the greatest respect, the argument, "We cannot have such investment in my constituency because there is another school that would like some more money," is a policy of equal misery for all, whereas our policy is to spend more money on existing state schools, within the economy's ability to afford it, but also to go in for a partnership between the public and private sectors to bring excellent and popular new schools into the state system.

Mr. Straw: The Secretary of State is new to his job, but he should look at the disgraceful and seedy history of the development of the city technology college programme. He would discover that the original proposition was that all, or a substantial part of, the capital costs should come from business sponsors, but that today well over 80 per cent. comes from the taxpayer. Contrary to what Sir Cyril Taylor, who is not a man to be relied on, may have said, cash paid over by businesses is not £40 million, but £7 million.

That compares with a budget from the taxpayer of £130 million, which is plainly money denied those children and schools most in need in inner cities. If the system's funding is so good, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman now claims, will he here and now give a guarantee that, if the Interim Advisory Committee on School Teachers' Pay and Conditions makes a recommendation within its terms of reference, he will fund it fully?

Mr. Clarke: That is a sudden change of subject, but I do not mind.

Of course I realise that the original estimates of the proportion of public spending on CTCs have not always been borne out. There is a CTC in Nottingham, supported by Harry Djanogly and others, who have put in a great deal of finance. There is public sector investment in it and the others too, and private investment has been drawn in. It will be regarded as churlish by the people who live in these cities to resist investment in what are obviously great new schools. The Labour party commits itself to taking them all back under local authority control, because local authorities resent the fact that there are great new schools in their patch. They are hugely popular—the one in Nottingham is heavily over-subscribed. It is an attractive place to teach. I am told that the one in Croydon recently held a open day for parents which caused traffic jams because so many people tried to get to the site.

Private sector involvement in the CTCs is anathema to the Labour party. What does its commitment to quality mean, given that it is against some of the most popular new schools in the country, in unattractive parts of our cities? The Opposition are against them. The teachers and the unions do not like them; neither do Labour councils, because they are not controlled by the bureaucracy which is the main source of the Labour party's advice. So the Opposition attack some of the most popular schools in the country by trying to undermine them, by seeking to discourage future sponsorship, and by the sort of commitment that we heard from the hon. Member for Blackburn a moment ago.

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): Is it not evidence of the Labour party's destructive attitude to standards that, after criticising the A-level system which has been in place for 30 years and been the cause of more people going to university and successfully completing their course than ever before, the Opposition spokesman made absolutely no reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway), who asked him about Labour's alternative policies?

Mr. Clarke: I agree. Perhaps I should say something about A-levels and post-16 education and training.

I hope that we all agree that A-levels are a successful and trusted part of our education system. The numbers of A-level students are increasing, despite a demographic decline in the number of young people aged 16 to 19. But A-levels are not the whole picture. I shall certainly strive to increase dramatically the number of people receiving some form of education and training after the age of 16.

I realise that more breadth and variety of academic study and vocational training are required if we are to achieve this, but it is foolish to start by dismantling the A-level system, which has served the needs of people going into higher education so well. I am certainly not persuaded that we need one system of examinations and qualifications for everyone after the age of 16. Too often in the past, reform in education has started by dismantling existing systems of higher academic quality and then submerging them in untried broader arrangements.

I agree that my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) received no sensible reply. This image of the new Labour party trying reform is terribly reminiscent of what it tried in the past. In the name of breadth and wider opportunity, it latches on to the one proven and tried system which is valuable for admission to higher education and calls it a failure, under the guise of making the obvious point that we need to look again at the breadth of study and extend the number of people going in to higher education. The Labour party is specific only when attacking an extremely popular and well-tried system of exams which ensures good quality intake——

Mr. Straw: Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman not understand that virtually everyone who has to use the products of the education service, from the vice-chancellors of the universities through to the CBI, has said that A-levels are no longer appropriate? What they have sought and we have proposed is to implement what the Government wanted to do—the Higginson proposals for five-subject A-levels. If that is so bad, will the Secretary of State explain why, in Scotland, which has a broader system, a much higher proportion of young people stay on through higher education?

Mr. Clarke: We are out to consultation on this with the School Examinations and Assessment Council at the moment. I do not share the Labour party's starting point, which is to begin by abolishing A-levels and then move towards other ideas for widening the system. I also do not believe that there is universal acclaim for Higginson's proposals, and I agree with my hon. Friend the Member

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for Ealing, North that getting rid of A-levels before we have a satisfactory replacement should not be a high priority.

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): I hesitate to intervene in this English debate, but will the Secretary of State devote at least part of his speech to the part of higher education that Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland all share—the universities? There is a crisis in our universities and they are anxiously waiting to know what the right hon. and learned Gentleman is going to do to resolve it.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman rightly urges me to get on with my speech by ceasing to give way——

Mrs. Rosie Barnes (Greenwich) *rose*——

Mr. Clarke: I shall not give way again, even to the hon. Lady. I intend to move on the universities and to our reforms in higher education.

More young people than ever before are entering higher education. One in eight of the relevant age group entered higher education before we came to office. Today it is one in six, and the number seems likely to be one in five by next year. I believe that we should aim at one in four by the end of the century. That is a result of equality of opportunity, and it is a great asset to this country. More of our young people than ever before are entering our universities, polytechnics and colleges, which achieve excellent academic standards.

I do not think that most people appreciate the extent to which student numbers have spectacularly risen, especially in the past two or three years. I realise that morale in higher education is not as high as it should be. We have some of the best higher education institutions in the world. Britain's universities, polytechnics and colleges are among the most efficient in Europe and the west. We have higher standards for admission, and about 90 per cent. of entrants to higher education gain proper qualifications.

This is an amazing contrast with other countries which appear to have high levels of access. As an extreme example, in Italy, only 1·7 per cent. of entrants to higher education manage to obtain degrees within four years. A rising proportion of our young people enter higher education, and they have a much better success rate in their courses. The hon. Member for Blackburn has conceded as much. At 33 per cent., the proportion of the college-going age group achieving higher education qualifications in the United Kingdom is one of the highest in Europe. It is exceeded only by France, at 36 per cent. So we get out of our system a higher proportion of young people with qualifications than all but one of the other European Community member states.

As we increase participation, which is our policy, we must not lower academic standards. And we must continue to raise our efficiency. That depends on the dedication and commitment of our academic staff. I shall make it a high priority in my new high office to deal with their concerns, with which I am reasonably familiar from my work as a Member of Parliament. Incidentally, I am delighted to note how well the polytechnics are doing since we gave them and their directors freedom from local government control. Lord Glenamara, a Labour peer and former deputy Prime Minister, who is committed to the polytechnic movement, was quoted this morning as saying what a difference the Government abolishing local government control of polytechnics has made.

In the schools, the national curriculum is the most important element of reform of state education since 1944. It will raise standards by giving pupils an all-round education in a sensible range of subjects. It sets clear targets for what children should know, understand and be able to do in all these subjects at different stages of their schooling. Children and their teachers and parents will know more clearly what they are aiming to achieve. The delivery of good quality service of any kind—not only in education and health—requires the setting of clear objectives and standards at the outset.

Secondly, it requires the measurement of success in delivering those standards and clear reporting of the results to the consumer. All schools will report to parents with a clear assessment based on tests of children's progress in reaching levels of attainment in each subject of the national curriculum as appropriate. That is an extremely valuable and important reform. It is wholly negative for the hon. Member for Blackburn to describe as rubbish a change which is being increasingly recognised as valuable by those who work in the service and which will certainly be recognised as valuable by the parents.

Full implementation of most of the proposals is still a matter for the future. The national curriculum will steadily be put into practice in the 1990s and by 1992 the framework will be complete. Thereafter, it will evolve in the light of experience. The improvements in standards are beginning and will steadily emerge throughout the next decade. My predecessor recently announced that standard assessment tests for the core subjects to be taken by seven-year-olds in 1991 will focus on the basics of literacy, numeracy and scientific skills. I trust that the results of those tests will be given with clarity to parents who are anxious to know what progress is being made by their children. Tests for 11-year-olds and 14-year-olds and changes to the GCSE for 16-year-olds will all be steadily tried out and introduced over the next few years.

We have already talked generally about local management of schools and about grant-maintained schools, which take the matter to its logical conclusion. One of the most important effects of more local management public services of this kind is the effect on morale and motivation of the staff who work in them. One of the reasons for the holding back of our 1940s-style public services was their smothering by bureaucracy. As I have said, great central administration was imposed on the schools. It is difficult for those who work in the service to feel that they are in contact with day-to-day decisions and can influence them. Key decisions are taken by somebody who works in county hall or in Whitehall.

The local management of schools enables people to know who is making the decisions because they are working at first hand. That enables the governors and the teachers to know exactly where the key choice is being made and to have some chance of exerting an influence. Obviously, that raises the involvement of parents with governors and teachers, and it is important for parents to know that such people are able to run the school efficiently.

We have already discussed the fact that some local authorities are holding too much back for their central services and administration. It is a disgrace for the Labour party to defend that. It is also extremely foolish, and

Labour will be unpopular if it keeps defending county council control vis-a-vis local governor, parent and teacher control.

Grant-maintained schools are rapidly becoming more popular. Labour may laugh at them now, but it will weep thereafter over its unpopular commitment. Opposition Members, when they visit places in which grant-maintained schools are popular, will walk into the same elephant trap that has caught them over national health service hospital trusts. A year ago, there were 18 grant-maintained schools in operation. By September, the number had grown to 44, and 54 applications have now been approved. I am determined to encourage many more.

City technology colleges have been discussed. It is impossible for the Labour party to pose as a party of choice and standards while at the same time engaging in a bitter political battle against new colleges that are a welcome introduction to the education system.

I have set out a policy. I do not think that the hon. Member for Blackburn has a policy. He has a series of carping complaints and seeks to capitalise on a public mood without having the first idea of what he would do about it. He nearly found a policy recently, when he went on about teacher appraisal. He did that vigorously, and tried to set himself up as a man who might break away from the controlled teachers' unions. He did that because some of the teacher unions agreed with the system that he proposed. We have an open mind on the matter. We shall put teacher appraisal out to consultation and see where we go from there.

Mr. Straw: The previous Secretary of State said quite categorically in his announcement that the Government would not establish teacher appraisal by statutory regulation. Is this Secretary of State now saying that he might introduce it by statutory regulation?

Mr. Clarke: My predecessor was minded not to at that moment. He has put it out to consultation. I will address that question when it comes back and shall give the hon. Gentleman's opinion the regard that it deserves, on this matter as on others. His only reason for his remarks was that he thought he was disagreeing with my predecessor. That appears to be the only basis for his policy. He has no commitment to money. Not only has the Labour party made no promises about money, but it does not look credible when it tries to get rid of its past traditions of the wreckage that it created in the state education system. It does not appear to have a vision for the future.

The Leader of the Opposition recently attended our debate. At his party conference, he held up France as a model of the education system that the Labour party would like to give Britain. It is always easy to think that the grass is greener on the other side. I am a great francophile and an admirer of French peaks of academic excellence, such as the polytechnique and the ecole normale. But Britain spends more in current expenditure per pupil than does France. The purchasing power of teachers' salaries is higher in the United Kingdom under a Conservative Government than it is in socialist France. Only 67 per cent. of the posts were filled at the 1990 teaching entrance competition in France.

This morning's edition of *The Times* has an interesting story of what is going on in Paris, in this model country whose education system is to be emulated by an Opposition that aspires to government. I shall read the first sentence. This is the model to which the Leader of the Opposition aspires:

> "French riot police used tear gas and water cannon to disband hundreds of stone-throwing youths as they rampaged through the streets of Paris yesterday, marring a mass protest by thousands of students over falling standards in their schools."

On past performance, the Labour party only comes to life over the public services when there are strikes or disturbances. It would be interesting to know on which side of the barricades various Opposition Members would find themselves when we reach this dream scenario.

Obviously, the rather vacuous nature of Opposition policies is not our principal concern. Our concern is to press on with positive steps to a better state education system for all our children and our young people. The Government remain firmly committed to that, and we shall deliver that better education system over the next few years.

5.57 pm

Mr. Edward O'Hara (Knowsley, South): I confess to being slightly abashed at having opted to make my maiden speech, a significant occasion for me, in this debate, because I find that I am very much a supporting act to the grand main event which we witnessed earlier today. I am at least gratified if that means that there is still a slightly wider audience to hear my speech about my constituency. One might say,, sic transit gloria Knowsley. I shall make sure in future in less privileged circumstances that the attention of the House to Knowsley, South is more than transient.

It is fitting for me to make a brief but hearfelt tribute to Sean, my predecessor, who I know was widely respected by all hon. Members. Sean Hughes was a man of conscience, courage, dignity and quiet humour, and he was an excellent and well loved constituency Member of Parliament, whose promising career in the House and, quite likely, in government was so tragically cut short. I mourn the passing of a close friend and colleague of half a lifetime. Mutual friends may be interested to know that my family continues to have a close and affectionate relationship with Tricia and baby Charlotte.

I chose to make my maiden speech during this debate on education because education in Knowsley has been spoken about in uncomplimentary terms. I welcome this privileged opportunity to balance the record. I recognise the obligation that goes with that privilege—that I should refrain from polemic and controversy. I shall respect that obligation, although it is difficult for me to do so if I am adequately to represent the mood that I detected among the electorate of Knowsley, South, an overwhelming proportion of whom voted for me. I shall be content to have adequately represented them if, when I sit down, hon. Members on both sides of the House better understand the circumstances that inspired that mood.

The people of Knowsley, South include some old rural communities, in Whiston, Tarbock and Cronton, but overwhelmingly we are Scousers, resident in large pre and post-war overspill housing estates from Liverpool. The people exhibit the well-known Scouse qualities of humour, fortitude in adversity and a strong sense of community. A topical example of Scouse humour came recently when the deputy Prime Minister resigned and it was suggested that, as the main qualification for his successor was a lack of

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consuming desire to go into Europe, the Prime Minister might go on a recruiting drive to Everton football club.

I hasten to say that that joke was told to me by an Evertonian and it is a typical example of Scouse humour. We laugh at ourselves and each other unmercifully but woe betide anyone who laughs at us. Had the joke been made by an outsider, it would have been seen for the gross calumny that it is—a calumny that will be confounded soon when Everton once again starts winning trophies.

That humour is needed to sustain the people's fortitude in adversity—a commodity that is in abundant supply in Knowsley, South. In Knowsley as a whole, unemployment is sticking at twice the national average, no matter how it is calculated and in Knowsley, South, 47 per cent. of those who are unemployed have been out of work for over a year. Knowsley suffered disproportionately in the general shake-out of jobs in the early 1980s. Although there has been a recent nascent recovery in the economy, helped by an excellent and effective economic development unit run by the local authority, I share the fear of many locally that that delicate bud will be shrivelled by the frosts of entry into the exchange rate mechanism. I am trying not to be controversial. I have avoided the r word. At no point have I said r-e-c-e-s-s-i-o-n and I look forward to less privileged occasions when I shall be able to do so. I appeal to appropriate Ministers to note those concerns.

I shall explore the margins of licence by respectfully asking hon. Members on both sides of the House to reflect that market solutions, which may well work in other circumstances, may not work as well in certain environments, such as for industrial development in an area of underdeveloped infrastructure, for housing where the residual land values are negative and speculative investors may lose their investments, and for health provision in an area where there is both a disproportionate endemic incidence of chronic illnesses such as heart disease and cancer and a depressed economy. In many ways, it is as if the rules that may work well elsewhere do not work in the special circumstances of Knowsley, South.

This is true of education as well. Knowsley is notorious for one statistic—its position in the league table of selected examination results. It is sad that too seldom is there reference to the excellent achievements of schools and pupils in Knowsley and I shall not miss this once-and-for-all chance to draw attention to them. That statistic ignores the result of our tertiary college institution, the excellent Knowsley community college. Education for most of our pupils is organised on a primary, secondary, tertiary basis and the GCSE and A-level results in that college are better than the national average, but are never included in the statistics.

I was interested to hear the Secretary of State speak about the concept of added value and I accept it as a valid one. It is the weighting of raw examination results by taking account of various measures of deprivation. When measured by such criteria, Knowsley has been placed in the top 20 most efficient local education authorities. That is no wonder when it has been placed 456th out of 456 local education authorities on measures of deprivation. In the heart of Huyton there is a church parish that has achieved the astounding Z score of seven, and that is with hardly any ethnic minority families within its boundary.

The adverse comparisons ignore various vocational examinations achievements such as those validated by the City and Guilds, the Royal Society of Arts, the Business and Technician Education Council and various regional education boards. There are other examples of excellence in Knowsley, South. With the technical and vocational education initiative—an initiative which I know will be respected by Conservative Members—Knowsley was the first local authority to have its extension bid not only approved but held up as an example to the nation.

Another example of excellence is the use of computers in Knowsley. In any school there, one can see not only secondary school pupils but infants and children with special education needs manipulating keyboards and software in a way that puts us adults to shame. Leading Japanese educationists, no less, came to Knowsley, as one of two authorities which they chose to visit last year, to observe and learn from practices there.

Portage—the involvement of parents in the education of children in their early years—is something in which Knowsley is a national leader. That example, and the 70 per cent. provision of nursery places, mean that, at a time when there is national concern about declining reading standards at seven-plus, those standards are rising in Knowsley.

We are also justly proud of our youth orchestras and choirs. One of each were the only two invited to perform together in the national festival of music for youth, and they have an outstanding repertoire, ranging from Duke Ellington's "Caravan" to the "Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi" from Carl Orff's Carmina Burana. It brought tears to the eyes to hear the children of Knowsley

The House will know that curriculum awards are prestigious, are made every four years and are rather scarce. There are eight county comprehensive schools in Knowsley and three of them have received these awards, as has one of the special schools. There has been an interesting achievement in special education and Knowsley finds itself a national leader in educating and caring for children with physical disabilities. It has attracted considerable attention as a result of its achievements in toilet control for spina bifida children. These achievements have increased the confidence of such children and, as a result, their education attainments. Their life expectancy has also been increased. That is the sort of achievement in education that we value in Knowsley, and it is unfortunate that it is not recognised in the league tables to which I have referred.

Perhaps the most striking success of the education service in Knowsley was the massive vote of confidence that was shown in the opting-out ballot held for Ruffwood comprehensive school. In a 75 per cent. turnout, 97·4 per cent. of parents voted in support of the local authority. I believe that that is still a record. Some hon. Members might think that that was a flash in the pan. It might have come to their notice, however, that recently the Boundary Commission for England came up with the bright idea that Knowsley might be abolished. It was overwhelmed by 80,000 letters of protest. There are only about 160,000 people in Knowsley, 88,000 of whom are in Knowsley, South. What clearer demonstration of a strong sense of community could there be?

The teaching force of Knowsley was among the many sections of the community that came out overwhelmingly in support of the future of the authority. We have a loyal and dedicated teaching force and we have never felt the

need for local pay bargaining to retain its loyalty, although we must wonder whether such loyalty may be undermined if other local authorities start making money talk.

I have presented a picture of a proud, distinctive and deserving community in Knowsley, South, with responsible civic leaders who are respected—my people, whom I am proud to represent. They and their civic leaders need and deserve the sympathy, confidence and full support of hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber. In the context of the debate, the education service of Knowsley, South needs more adequate recognition than it has had in the past. I pledge myself to be vigilant and diligent on behalf of my constituents. If I am half successful, that will be my best tribute to Sean Hughes.

6.14 pm

Mr. Michael Jopling (Westmorland and Lonsdale): It gives me great pleasure to take up the remarks of the hon. Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) in his maiden speech. I think that we all remember the great feeling of elation and relief once that moment is over. I am sure that everyone would agree that that hon. Gentleman spoke with great pride, charm and eloquence. I congratulate him on having overcome the ordeal of his maiden speech.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, South paid a tribute to Sean Hughes which was generous, worthy and justified. I am sure that we all join with him in expressing sadness for the reasons for which he finds himself in this place. The hon. Gentleman spoke extremely well and I hope that we shall have the pleasure of hearing him on other occasions. He was right to be non-controversial. I am sure that he will have many opportunities to attempt to beat the hell out of the Government as time goes on. His return to the old custom of non-controversial maiden speeches is one that many other new Members may like to follow in future.

I welcome enormously the decision to have a debate on education today. I wish to draw the Government's attention to what I consider to be a serious crisis in education in Cumbria, which includes my constituency. It arises from the introduction of the local management of schools—LMS. That move, which was made by the Government, was generally welcomed by parents and governors. Most governors were eager to play a much greater part in the management of their local schools, and they began their new work with a great deal of enthusiasm and dedication. Already, however, many are disillusioned. Almost all schools in Cumbria suffer from a considerable shortage of cash as many schools are seriously underfunded.

The reason for underfunding is not difficult to find. The problem is traceable directly to Cumbria county council's distribution of funds to schools from its education budget. I tabled a question shortly before the prorogation of Parliament and I received a reply on Wednesday 31 October. It appears that the shire county's average distribution from its potential schools budget to schools for LMS amounts over the county as a whole to an average of 77·4 per cent. If Cumbria were able to distribute that average of its £130 million potential school budget, the schools would receive £101 million. That is the sum that the schools would receive if Cumbria county council were in line with the average.

Unfortunately Cumbria does no such thing. It distributes only 71·2 per cent. of the potential schools budget, and that is only £93 million. It means that the schools are being underfunded by £8 million. That is the sum that they would receive if Cumbria had a distribution that was as generous as only the average for shire counties. On average, the 360 schools in Cumbria each receive £22,000 less than they would receive if the county made an average distribution. Unfortunately, Cumbria distributes the lowest percentage of its education budget to schools for LMS of any shire county. Cumbria is therefore the meanest education authority in Britain, and that meanness affects governors, staff and children.

It will not have escaped the memory of many of my colleagues that Cumbria county council is controlled by a consortium of the Labour and Liberal parties. It is that consortium, and that alone, which is responsible for the underfunding. Its decision to hold back excessive sums to prop up a top-heavy administration means that school governors have been placed in an impossible position.

At the beginning of his speech, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State spoke of education being smothered by local bureaucracy. If he wants to see an example of that, he should look only to Cumbria. The independent Audit Commission examined Cumbria county council's education administration and inspection system and its costs earlier this year. The commission demonstrated that, compared with a group of similar shire counties—far-flung and scattered areas—Cumbria county council spends between £1·2 million and £2·1 million more on education administration and inspection than the average sum for counties that are similar and within its own family, as it were. It is a tragedy that those Liberal and Labour councillors—who have been made fully aware of the meanness and the inefficiency that have resulted from their policies—have not knocked heads together and put Cumbria at the top of the league table for generosity towards schools. Instead, they are content for Cumbria to languish at the bottom.

Some governors of some schools have been thinking seriously whether it would be in the best interests of their schools, the children and the parents to seek grant-maintained status. For example, Kirkbie Kendal school has almost unanimously decided to move towards grant-maintained status. One reason for that—there are several—is that, instead of the current £30,000 deficit on its budget, on gaining grant-maintained status, its financial affairs would turn round and it would have an £80,000 surplus. That would make a tremendous difference to the school. That decision has been taken objectively, in the interests of the school, the parents and the children. I am not aware of any political pressures being applied on the governors to make such a move.

The purpose of my speech is to urge Ministers at once to force Cumbria county council to be more generous to its schools. During past months, Ministers have made various noises about the unsatisfactory distribution of money to schools, but there has been no action. The governors, parents and pupils in Cumbria are fed up with their schools being starved of cash, and they want help. They are turning to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State because he is the one person who can unlock the till and be more generous. I hope that he will listen.

6.22 pm

Mr. John Garrett (Norwich, South): I compliment my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on an eloquent and articulate maiden speech. We were deeply hurt by the loss of Sean Hughes. I thought that my hon. Friend's speech showed an excellent understanding of the conditions in his part of the world and a deep feeling for the people. We look forward to his long and successful career in the House.

The sole education proposal in the Gracious Speech is for new negotiating machinery for the pay and conditions of teachers. In a way, that was overshadowed by the autumn statement the next day, which revealed that the increase in spending on education—of which much was made at the time—was not even sufficient to meet the backlog of building maintenance necessary in our schools. On the face of it, the Gracious Speech removes the teachers' long-standing grievance about the removal of their negotiating rights since the 1987 dispute. However, there is a real fear that the break-up of national bargaining will drive down salaries and lead to a free-for-all in which teachers will be no better off.

The observations that I wish to make on education will relate to the county that I represent. Norfolk is a typical Tory shire county, although its policies are made by Tories that we could describe as being of the primitive tendency. Such examples that I cite will be homely, but they will be drawn from the council's figures and will therefore be hard to dispute.

In Norfolk, one in five secondary school teachers are expected to leave their posts this year. The number of primary school teacher resignations has also soared this year. In 1987, the turnover of Norfolk teachers was below the national average. In two years, it has risen from 8 per cent. to almost 20 per cent. In primary education during those two years, the turnover has risen from 8 per cent. to 13·5 per cent. It is not a high wage area, so it is not as though treachers are being poached by high-paying local employers.

We do not have to look far for the reason for that rapid upsurge in the level of teacher resignations. Their average salaries are now 40 per cent. below the level of the 1974 Houghton award. Year after year since then, teachers' pay has lagged behind other settlements. It is not surprising that the Department of Education and Science has projected a national shortfall of 12,000 teachers in the national curriculum subjects. There is a crisis in teacher supply. Fewer graduates are entering the profession, which is not surprising because the starting salary is significantly below the average wage offered by industry to a graduate. More teachers are leaving the profession. Education can no longer compete for top-quality graduates. The enormous load on teachers following the Education Reform Act 1988 has not been recompensed and the teaching service is being irrevocably damaged.

In Norfolk, the arrangements for the local management of schools will lead to more teacher redundancies. According to headmasters in the county—16 of them met recently to discuss the matter—some schools have lost up to £40,000 a year in funding. As I believe that it is proper that we should represent the grass roots feeling on these matters, I wish to refer to the Angel road middle school in my constituency. Its head, Mr. Holman, wrote to parents:

"You may have heard that the Government are in the process of handing the entire responsibility for school finance to the Head and Governors. In theory, this should give us greater flexibility to provide the right education for your children.

However, what has happened is that the Local Education Authority have drawn up a formula by which they allocate money to schools. Based on the Authority's formula we stand to lose a colossal amount of money compared to this present financial year. So great is the deficit that we are having to look at terminating the employment of two full-time teachers and one part-time teacher. The effect on your child's education will be very serious. There will be no help given to children in small groups. Maths, Science and Craft groups will have to stop. All children will be in classes of over 30 pupils and indeed some may have to be vertically grouped. This means mixing older and younger children together in the same class."

That is in a county which has always been a notorious low spender on education.

The *Eastern Daily Press* said:

"NORFOLK came bottom of the class in the whole of England for the number of youngsters who left school without a single GCSE qualification.

Out of every 100 Norfolk pupils to leave county-run schools last year, 13 had no GCSE qualifications—the worst record of any shire county in England, according to statistics produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy."

It is also the case that in Tory Norfolk an average of 1·9 per cent. of under-fives receive nursery education, compared with a national average of 6·8 per cent. There are a mere 195 pupils in four nursery schools in a county with a population of 600,000. There are just 200 places in nursery classes and 3,000 places in under-five reception classes. Education is grossly underfunded. It should be a matter of shame that there are still 60 schools with outside toilets. Children of the county are ill-served. Conservative Members would not want to send their children to schools with outside toilets, so I do not understand why my constituents have to do so.

It is outrageous that, nationally, 65 per cent. of our young people end their education at 16. There are plenty of studies—for example, those by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research—that show that our relatively low productivity as a nation results in the low level of spending on education and vocational training. The institute has carried out countless studies of British productivity compared with German productivity, and time and again the disparity—the German superiority—in productivity can be directly traced to the level of education and vocational training of its workers.

There is plenty of evidence that our spending nationally on post-school education directly affects our competitive economic performance. I have spent my life working in management in industry and I know that the inferiority of a company's productivity is often due to the lack of qualifications of its supervisory and managerial staff.

We have the lowest proportion of 18-year-olds in part or full-time education in Europe—about 20 per cent. in Britain compared with 80 per cent. in Germany—in full-time education. Our education system produces an elite, but fails to provide anything for the bulk of school leavers. That is not new. That disparity was pointed out more than 100 years ago. In the 1880s, Lyon Playfair on the Board of Education referred to it and studies throughout the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s showed the effect of the neglect of higher and further education.

My constituency has the extremely successful university of East Anglia, the planning provision for which has been thrown into chaos by the disaster of the University Funding Council's planning exercise for 1991-95 and its

decision to withdraw from long-term planning. Commenting on that, the university of East Anglia's vice-chancellor, Professor Derek Burke, said:

"It is ironic, to say the least, that after encouraging universities to produce coherent, sensible plans for the next five years the UFC has been unable to do the same. A-level scores at all universities are rising, applications to UCCA are booming and it is clear to me that we have a high quality and much sought after product. However, without a firm basis for planning it is quite possible that we shall be unable to offer many able young people the opportunity to benefit from the higher education they deserve. That will be a tragedy and the blame for that tragedy will lie squarely with the Government and their agents in this matter—the UFC."

I could not have put it better.

Our education system is not adequate to support an advanced technological economy. It fails to make the best use of the talents of our people, which are criminally wasted. The Government are not committed to the development of educational excellence. That is not surprising when we have a Prime Minister whose only accomplishment as Secretary of State for Education and Science was to take milk from schoolchildren. The Government's education policy is a thing of shreds and tatters and it fails our young people disgracefully.

6.32 pm

Mr. James Pawsey (Rugby and Kenilworth): I listened with some interest to the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Garrett). He devoted a considerable part of his remarks to teachers' pay and teacher shortages, to which I shall also refer. I suspect that he will not be unduly surprised to discover that I draw rather different conclusions from his.

The hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) is well intentioned and I would not be at all surprised to hear that he was against sin and generally in favour of motherhood. But he is something of a blackbird in a shadow Cabinet full of vultures. Whenever he says that he would like to increase spending on schools, buildings and advanced education, one can always hear the vultures in the background croaking, "Only as resources allow." That was the catchphrase which those of us who have served on Standing Committees considering education Bills with the hon. Gentleman will recall. As hon. Members will know, the way to improved education is not paved with qualified promises.

However, by contrast, I can tell the House that the Government have made resources available to education and in 1991-92 we shall be spending some £17·5 billion —16 per cent. more than in the preceding year. That truly is an enormous sum, which gives the lie to those who seek to claim that the Government are cutting education. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Spending on education is probably equalled only by the growth in admissions to advanced education. For example, in 1989 some 350,000 full-time students were in higher education. But even that truly enormous figure has improved this year, with admissions being increased by a further 7 per cent. That underlines two points. First, it shows that the prophets who claimed that the Education (Student Loans) Act 1989 would mean the end of advanced education as we have known it were wrong. It has not proved to be a disincentive.

Secondly, the higher number of admissions to advanced education could take place only if a sufficient number of properly qualified young people were coming forward. A larger student population must be based on a greater number of our young people taking A-levels, not only in the right subjects but to the right standards. That was a point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State.

That brings me quite naturally to the first of my cautionary notes to my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State, whom I welcome to his new post. It is critical that we maintain the rigour and quality of A-levels. As my hon. Friend the Member for Darlington (Mr. Fallon) said, they set the gold standard. He was right to draw specific attention to that. If we seek to devalue the quality of A-levels we shall in turn undermine the quality of degrees. Therefore, it is of greatest importance that my right hon. and hon. Friends resist the blandishments of the so-called reformers, who apparently include the hon. Member for Blackburn, who seek to undermine the discipline and standards of A-levels.

My second cautionary note refers to the Education Reform Act 1988. It is fair to remind the House that that has been in place for only two years and it will take time for the reforms to work through. My right hon. and learned Friend referred to grant-maintained schools, about 50 or 60 of which exist. That is nothing like enough. The reason why there are not more such schools is not that they are unpopular but that we built too many obstacles into the Act. Therefore, I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to make it easier for schools to opt out.

I was grateful to the hon. Member for Blackburn for clarifying the Labour party's policy in response to my intervention. Its policy, so far as it has one, is one of abolition. It would abolish the remaining grammar schools, the city technology colleges, the assisted places scheme and grant-maintained schools. It is the party of the abolitionists. As I said earlier, the hon. Gentleman confirmed that grant-maintained schools would be abolished despite the fact that each and every grant-maintained school has a ballot in which parents are required to express their preferences. Despite that, Labour Members would take choice away from those parents.

Labour Members would seek to introduce a uniform greyness across the nation's schools, with all excellence and brightness being extinguished. But Conservative Members want grant-maintained schools to survive, and if we are to guarantee that, we need more grant-maintained schools to emerge. Labour Members will abolish grant-maintained schools at their peril, because they will be denying parents the right freely to express their opinion. The greater the number of grant-maintained schools, the harder and more difficult it will be for Labour Members to destroy those schools if they should ever come to office.

My third cautionary note relates to vouchers. I substantially with what my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State said at the weekend, and again today at the Dispatch Box. I am convinced that the Education Reform Act 1988—specifically, in its references to open enrolment, local management of schools, and grant-maintained schools—takes us a long way down the road signposted by the proponents of the voucher. The voucher is not a panacea, but I believe that it might have a place and I therefore urge my right hon. and learned Friend to consider the introduction of the voucher system for pre-school education—for the non-statutory sector of education. Vouchers could be used by parents to obtain good nursery or playschool education for their children.

[Mr. James Pawsey]

I wish to reflect for a moment—that is all that it will take—on the comments of the Leader of the Opposition at the Labour party's recent conference. Evidently, the right hon. Gentleman believes that we should be following the educational example of France and Germany. As he was the Opposition spokesman in the days before the hon. Member for Blackburn came to the House, I assume that he knows that Germany has the system that we once had in the United Kingdom, which the Opposition and some of their supporters in the teacher unions did so much to dismantle.

The system was based on three different types of schools—grammar schools, technical schools and elementary schools. That system works as well in Germany as it once did in the United Kingdom. I find it ironic that the leader of the party that did so much to wreck what was so good should now have the impudence and cheek to mourn its passing. As I said earlier, Opposition Members even now wish to abolish the remaining grammar schools. Evidently, in Opposition Members' minds, grammar schools are acceptable only in Paris or Bonn. They are not acceptable in London, Sheffield or Coventry. It is a remarkable example of how distance lends acceptability. The latest initiative by the Leader of the Opposition is simply a smokescreeen designed to disguise the Opposition's complete lack of policy.

The present Government have not so far reaped the credit for increasing spending or educational reform.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): Oh!

Mr. Pawsey: It is all very well for the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South-East (Mr. Turner) to laugh. He is a stranger to our debates on education. His ignorance about education is matched only by his ignorance about other matters. [HON. MEMBERS: "Withdraw."] I will not withdraw. I do not believe that education——

Mr. Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pawsey: The hon. Gentleman can wait a moment. He must contain himself. I shall give way to him, but he will have to be patient. I have to say to him that I do not regard education as in any way a laughing matter.

Mr. Turner: The hon. Gentleman says that I do not take an interest in education. He is mistaken. I am very keen on education, but I am not keen on listening to his Luddite remarks.

Mr. Pawsey: I look forward to the hon. Gentleman's showing more interest in educational issues in future.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Pawsey: No. I am dealing with the hon. Gentleman, and he requires dealing with. If hon. Members care to take part sensibly in our debate, we shall hear their contributions.

Given time, our reforms will substantially improve the quality and standard of state education and that is the sector in which the majority of our children are educated. One reason why we have not been given the credit that we deserve is that we have not so far captured the hearts and minds of the teaching profession. It is true that teachers feel isolated, and the reasons are not hard to see. One has only to remember the recent trade union conference, at which the general secretary was shouted down by his own members. Such spectacles—together with recent demands for industrial action—tend to undermine public confidence in the profession as a whole.

Most hon. Members will know that the majority of teachers are committed both to their profession and to the children in their charge. The problem is that many of those teachers are content to be led by the militants in the teachers' unions. The Opposition should be aware that, if teachers wish to be treated as professionals, they must act as professionals. Can anyone remember the last time that a doctor or lawyer debated taking industrial action against his own client group?

Teaching is a genuinely important job, although the remuneration for it does not always reflect that importance. It is true that there have been substantial improvements in teachers' pay in the past few years. Teachers' pay will have risen by more than 50 per cent. on average in cash terms since March 1986. That is a substantial amount, but, to some extent, it underlines the fact that teachers' pay has drifted behind that of comparable professions. I believe that we need a method of targeting—I hate to use the word—the best and most committed teachers so that they receive additional remuneration, commensurate with their abilities, talents and enthusiasm for their work. Those who should not be in the profession and could not care less about the children in their charge should be treated far less generously than those who have a genuine commitment to the children.

I welcome the proposals in the Queen's Speech for a new negotiating machinery for teachers' pay, which will allow direct negotiations between local authorities and teachers' unions. In addition, the Government have undertaken that they will not normally override a settlement in the range between the bottom 25 per cent. and the top 25 per cent. of settlements in the non-manual private sector. There is also provision, in the event of disagreement, for a reference back to a type of interim advisory committee. The new negotiating machinery is not "son of Burnham". It does not take us back to the appalling days when there was no agreement in the profession but only chaos.

I should like to close—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear"] —by referring to teacher shortages. I am interested that hon. Members are so anxious that I should bring my remarks to a close; goodness knows, we certainly have to suffer their remarks.

I have recently read that the teaching unions believe that there is a teacher shortage of about 10,000. That contrasts sharply with the results of the Department's September 1990 vacancy survey. In the 104 LEA areas that supplied the figures for that survey, more than 24,000 posts were filled during the summer, leaving only 1,400 posts unfilled as of 3 September, and temporary arrangements have been made to cover all but a very few of those vacancies. Only three of the 104 LEAs reported a larger number of vacancies than they had had in January.

I wish my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State well in his new post. I have no doubt that his will be a firm hand but that that firmness will be tempered by his well-known and customary charm and courtesy.

6.49 pm

Mr. David Bellotti (Eastbourne): I am grateful for your tolerance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in calling two hon. Members to make their maiden speeches today.

I am only the third Member of Parliament to represent Eastbourne in 55 years. Sir Charles Taylor represented Eastbourne for 30 years from 1935—a record of service rarely equalled in the House. Ian Gow represented Eastbourne for 16 years from 1974 until that despicable act of terrorism, which we all equally condemn, so tragically took him from us. Ian Gow's record of service was also rarely equalled, due to his dedication, concern and loyalty, which were so freely given. We will always remember him, and I know that all hon. Members will join me in recording our expression of deep sympathy to his family and friends.

Two of the issues that Ian Gow raised in his maiden speech remain important today—the fight against the centralisation of power and to the need to secure investment in British industry. I shall continue to raise those concerns in this House.

Eastbourne is a marvellous constituency. It has the benefit of an excellent climate, a wonderful shoreline and the south downs as a backcloth. As many hon. Members already know, it is a first-class tourist resort. Its people are truly friendly and about one third of them are retired. However, we are a growth area and large increases in the under-14 and the 25-to-44 age groups are planned in the coming decade. By the turn of the century, the proportion of Eastbourne's people who are retired will have fallen to 25 per cent.—a significant change.

Our local economy has in the past been hugely dependent on tourism, but that is now supplemented by the development of an industrial estate, an active business services sector, and a growth in retail outlets. The importance of those activities was much in evidence during the recent election.

Of course, we received many visitors during the election. It may amuse or interest the House to know that the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) was among them and that my right hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick, and Lauderdale (Sir D. Steel) commented when we met that he was the first definite Conservative we had met all day.

Another visitor was the right hon. Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker), who accompanied his visit with a personal letter to me, inviting me to join his party. I am sure that the House will acknowledge my good judgment in declining that invitation and staying with a party that is increasing in the polls day by day, with a leader to whom we give our unanimous support. I am sure that even the Prime Minister is now aware that our squawk is getting louder and louder day by day.

We also received a visit from the Leader of the Opposition, who saw one of our excellent schools, which has the benefit of extra teachers who were appointed following a Liberal Democrat initiative, which was supported by Labour, when I was chairman of the education committee.

My constituents made it clear during the election that they will always welcome visitors but, of course, their main concerns were the real issues that affect their lives. They and I now look upon the Gracious Speech to see whether it addresses those issues and concerns.

Our local economy has suffered in recent years. We have seen large-scale redundancies from local companies. We have empty hotels boarded up on the sea front and many local shops are standing empty. What we need in our economy is what the country needs—a massive fall in interest rates to get the economy going again. Without investment, there is no hope of turning the tide of local recession, and without a healthy economy, how can we pay for the essential public services?

My constituents are also concerned about the 28 per cent. increase in burglaries that they have seen this year. The Gracious Speech states that the Government will "vigorously pursue . . . policies" to fight crime, but will they agree to the repeated requests from the Sussex police authority to employ more police officers on the beat? Nearly all the extra officers who have been employed in recent years have had to be used to police Gatwick airport, for which the Government are reimbursed.

My constituents are also concerned about health care. The number of hospital beds availabe has decreased while the waiting lists for many operations have increased. Mentally ill patients have been discharged into the community with less than the support that they deserve. The Gracious Speech states that the Government will

"improve the quality of Health and Social Services",

yet the Government proceed with the opting-out proposals in adjoining areas which do not, to my constituents, address the key issue of quality. When my constituents visit their local district general hospital, they are charged 40p to use the car park. That is nothing but a disgrace and a tax on the relatives of the sick and the dying. I hope that that can be changed if there is any semblance left of a caring society.

The Government's proposals for care in the community are vital for Eastbourne. The postponement of the provisions for care of the elderly, when some local authorities were ready for their responsibilities, was not a good start. The test will come when the level of resources is agreed. Already in East Sussex, we are not happy about the financial proposals for the mentally ill from April 1991. I shall watch the arrangements for the transfer of care in the community to local authorities very carefully, and the Government will be given a hard time if they fail to deliver their promises.

Parents in Eastbourne are very concerned about the education of their children. They perceive the Government passing the buck back to them for the management and funding of schools. The Gracious Speech refers to

"action to improve quality in education",

yet there cannot be improvements in quality when a service is so under-resourced and its professionals so regularly attacked by the Government. When I was listening to the Secretary of State for Education and Science earlier, I realised just how out of touch the Government are with the delivery of education at a local level.

There is no large-scale bureaucracy in our county hall in Lewes in East Sussex. The staff there are working flat out to meet the demands placed on them by central Government. The Government's proposal for a city technology college in Sussex led to the loss of an important proposal for a new secondary school, which had been put forward by the Church. The CTC then withdrew, and the county council was left to mop up the consequences. Class sizes in our county continue to rise because we do not have

[Mr. David Bellotti]

the funds to employ the teachers to bring those sizes down. Yes, we need to improve quality, but that is not achievable under the current Government's policies.

There are no proposals on housing in the Gracious Speech, yet we have a problem with homelessness in Eastbourne. There are homeless people on our streets every night. The ability of the local authority to respond to that crisis is hampered time and again by central Government. The recent Government proposal to change the subsidy determination relating to leases has very serious implications for our area. I ask the Government to think again on that matter. Surely it makes sense for empty properties to be used to house homeless families rather than to use expensive bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Unless the Government change their mind, in Eastbourne alone over 100 families every year will not be housed.

I was interested in, and I welcome, the reference in the Gracious Speech to promoting efficiency in transport. I trust that that extends to the time that journeys take. Eastbourne has one of the busiest railway level crossings in Europe. The Hampden park crossing costs industry dear, as lorries from the nearby industrial estate queue time after time, wasting precious work hours. If the Government are serious about efficiency, they will address that local concern, affecting my constituents, immediately.

At the core of many of the issues that I have raised lies the delivery of local services. The quality of those services has declined during the past decade. The whole of the blame for that lies at the door of this Government. In 1981, when I joined the East Sussex county council, we received a grant from the Government to cover 40 per cent. of our costs. In 1990, that grant is just 16 per cent. of our costs. Local services cannot be delivered with quality in mind when central Government have such an appalling disregard for local services. Instead of curbing the powers of local government and centralising power in their own hands, the Government should work in partnership to deliver services which our local communities need and deserve.

As the Government reduce their services, further burdens are placed on the voluntary sector. In many cases voluntary organisations have become the lifeline for local people. But the very curbs on public expenditure which reduce local services hit the voluntary sector too. While greater reliance is placed on them, funding from local and central government is reduced. In Eastbourne we have 10,000 carers. Our community depends on them and without their dedication there would be great suffering. But I see nothing in the Gracious Speech to give them the support that they so richly deserve.

My constituents raise with me matters such as the future of our planet, the suffering of animals in transit abroad for slaughter—I welcome the RSPCA's initiative today on that matter—the unjust burden of the poll tax and the poor level of pensions compared to our colleagues in Europe. I shall return to some of those matters in future speeches.

Unlike the Government, I was elected with the support of over 50 per cent. of those who voted. The message from Eastbourne is loud and clear. Over a wide range of policies, the Government have got it wrong. The Gracious Speech offers very little comfort to my constituents. They can only look forward to the day when the Government are replaced by a caring and compassionate Government who will begin to address the real needs of the community that I now proudly represent.

Several Hon. Members *rose* —

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I remind the House that the 10-minute limit on speeches is now in operation.

7.1 pm

Sir Ian Lloyd (Havant): The House has been entertained by two most distinguished maiden speeches. I offer my congratulations to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) on not only the wit and humour that he brought to this place—that is never in sufficient supply—but the generous tribute that he paid to Ian Gow, a man who was greatly respected on both sides of the House. The beginning of the hon. Gentleman's speech had the complete agreement of every party and every hon. Member.

Bismarck once said that his respect for a man was based on what was left when all his vanities were stripped away. In this place our respect tends to be based on what is left when all invective is stripped away. As the hon. Members for Eastbourne and for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) will discover, invective is a popular and fashionable tool. What we hope for and sense that we may have from them is more rationality and sound information in their speeches. Of course they will be challenged in due course on many matters, but this evening they got away with it.

This may be the last occasion on which I have the privilege of speaking in the debate on the Address although it is just possible that it may be the last but one. I begin by confirming my broad support for the content of the Gracious Speech. I shall concentrate on a relatively narrow matter which is neglected by not only this Gracious Speech but virtually every one that I have heard since 1964. If there is one profound regret that I shall carry away with me in due course, it is that our system of political allegiance and loyalty seems to preclude our ever asking the most important and significant question that we should ask ourselves from time to time—"What components of our national failure in any sphere continue to endure under all political Administrations?"

Corelli Barnett asked that question in his most fascinating book entitled "Audit of War", but it seems that we have not learnt to ask it in times of peace. I suspect that the reason why we do not ask it is that the answer is too embarrassing, for it deprives some of us—indeed, all of us—of our raison d'etre. In the long term, if we do not govern by reason, mankind will fail. In the short term, alas, if we do not respect political emotion, prejudice and the ignorance which is often entrenched by that process or by vested interests, the democratic system will never hand us the levers of power. That dilemma underlies, if it does not at times undermine, the democratic system.

It is to an area of national failure that I now turn. The subject of today's debate is described as education and training. Those are topics of immense importance with a high political profile. All politicians in all parties have been educated and, therefore, are prima facie experts on the subject and have strong views on it. Moreover, today's "educorate", to coin a term, is tomorrow's electorate. The Jesuits knew a thing or two when they said, "Give me the

child and you may have the man." Both my hon. Friends and Oppositon Members say, "Give me the child and you may have the voter."

It is astonishing and disturbing that nowhere in the Gracious Speech or the programme for debate is the word "science" mentioned. It was not even mentioned by Ministers in the Department which theoretically carries responsibility for it. Yet the Prime Minister rightly and with genuine conviction repeatedly emphasises its importance. Industry recognises its dependence on science. Document after document and report after report consider our national research and development in the general scheme of things and express continuing anxiety. That follows from one Administration to another, one inquiry to another and one failure of industrial performance to another. Like the double bass, it is in every symphony orchestra. It provides a deep and disturbing accompaniment to every theme. Yet we ignore it. Why? Many hon. Members will have their own explanations but I shall not give mine. My purpose is to focus on a central issue. I hope to demonstrate the significance of the Procedure Select Committee's recommendation that:

"science and technology is too important to be absent from the agenda of the House of Commons."

I have no wish to appear unduly alarmist or to suggest that the Government's approach to the problem of global warming is necessarily wrong or inadequate. However, I have followed the matter closely for some years, and each time I return to it the circumstantial evidence is more alarming, the scientific unanimity, although not complete, is greater, and the tocsin sounds with ever greater urgency. As there should be, a worldwide debate is in progress in scientific, governmental and other conferences, such as that recently hosted by the Canadian Government and the Council of Europe in Ottawa. At many such conferences we read papers which not only pose formidable policy options but with ever greater frequency confront us with the terrifying phrase, "the extinction of the human race". I cannot confirm that prediction with any authority, but I find some of the papers both convincing and disturbing.

Three important conclusions can be drawn. First, we shall not have scientific proof before the end of the century, if then. Secondly, whether we do anything or not, the proof may arrive too late. Thirdly, we must contain the deterioration of the atmosphere, and technology alone, based on the best available science, can provide us with the means to avoid the collapse of the atmosphere.

There are no national solutions for global problems. The mechanisms for agreeing, let alone implementing, solutions are weak, primitive and unlikely to be effective. There is no agreement about the allocation of responsibility, causes and effects, who is to pay for what, how soon targets may be achieved or whether the targets will be adequate. Within the next decade there is at least a probability that we shall have to agree, first, that the Chinese should not increase their coal burn by 400 million tonnes per annum, as their energy plan contemplates; secondly, that massive carbon taxes will have to be placed on fossil fuels not only in this country but worldwide; thirdly, that the priority given to energy efficiency will have to be raised to unprecedented levels; fourthly, that non-fossil fuel energy technology will have to be both developed and transferred to the third and fourth worlds; and, finally, if, as a recent Massachusetts Institute of Technology study concluded, the most efficient method of capturing carbon dioxide and fossil fuel power increases the cost of that power by 80 per cent., no less, we shall have to accept and legislate for the economic and social consequences of massive increases in the real cost of electricity.

In case the House concludes that there is no evidence to justify such conclusions, I put the following facts before it. First, examination of the Antarctic ice cores shows that throughout history the concentration of atmospheric carbon dioxide has never exceeded 0·03 per cent. or been less than 0·018 per cent. Since the 1930s it has risen to 0·035 per cent. It will reach 0·4 per cent. by the year 2010 and 0·6 per cent. by the end of the next century.

In a 2,300 page report on the subject the Bundestag has concluded that the rise in the earth's temperature will probably be three times higher than the ecosystem can withstand. It has proposed an international trust fund of £7 billion to deal with Third world industrialisation, and another fund of £3 billion per annum to preserve tropical rain forests. Much will depend on whether the feedback processes are positive or negative.

We are looking at policy options which involve expenditure on a scale never hitherto conceived by the human race, if the deterioration exceeds the case and scale predicted. One estimate, which is based on predicted increases in energy consumption and fossil fuel burn, implies massive reafforestation and afforestation programmes which could cost £10,000 billion a year, or $1,000 per capita of the human race. If our population rises to 10 billion, as is predicted, and by then gross world product rises to $4,000 per capita, which is double the present, the cost of saving the world's atmosphere could rise to 25 per cent. of gross world product.

Politicians generally are criticised for being too alarmist about this, but that charge cannot be sustained. If the political implications of scientific research are little understood, the scientific implications of political neglect will feed back into the political arena rapidly and possibly with devastating consequences. Starving, freezing or flooded communities will not show much sympathy or tolerance for political leaders who in the coming critical decade put the subject at the bottom of their agenda.

Nor will they respect those who starve science of the funds needed to attach significant assessments of probability to various technical options, and who concentrate on deploring the erosion of national sovereignty, when it is becoming an irrelevance, or on redistributing national wealth, when the energy systems on which wealth creation depends have been shown to cause unacceptable damage to the planet as a whole wherever and whenever that energy is created by consuming fossil fuels or producing chlorofluorocarbons.

Where does that leave our priorities? *[Interruption.]* I see that I have run out of time. Science is consuming less than 0·5 per cent. of our national public expenditure. The analysis of that in the document——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I am sorry, but I must call the hon. Gentleman to order after 10 minutes.

7.12 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I realise that we are all short of time and I shall endeavour to limit myself to 10 minutes. First, I must congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) on their excellent

[Mr. Bill Michie]

speeches. It is clear that they will make good contributions to our debates and, no doubt, they will become accustomed to the idea of being restricted to 10 minutes at this time in the evening.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) made it clear that we face a crisis in education. It comes at a time when both the Government and the Opposition are saying that we have a desperate shortage of skills, whether in engineering, science or other areas. The only way in which the country can change that is by investing more in the education of our children and young people from nursery school onwards. It is important that we get the equation on educational funding right.

Our country is losing out because of a lack of competitiveness. Our European Community partners and most of our competitor nations are far ahead of us in new technology, marketing and the rest. We can hold our own only by educating our people to higher standards than those we have at present. Despite that, the Government seem unable to put the matter right.

The Queen's Speech mentions that the Government will

"strengthen parental responsibility for children"

and

"improve quality in education."

Obviously it is a short speech and does not say how that will come about. I have listened to other speeches and I am not convinced that the Government will do that. We undoubtedly need to strengthen parental responsibility for children, but when will the Government accept their responsibility for educating children to the necessary standards?

The Government claim that they will improve the quality of education, yet local authorities—mine as well as many others—are continually starved of funds. They are massively underfunded. That affects school buildings, which is bad enough in itself. How can we have a successful education system when the buildings are dilapidated? One school in my constituency must be closed every time there is a heavy rainfall. What sort of modern system do we have when our children and teaching staff must tolerate that sort of condition? It is no good the Government blaming local authorities. Clearly, they are underfunded for buildings, books, appropriate teacher-pupil ratios and youth provision. There is also a lack of funding for nursery and rising-five provision.

I have received letters, as I am sure most hon. Members have, from institutes of higher education as well as heads of primary schools pleading for the Government to wake up to the problems of our schools and colleges. Not long ago the previous Secretary of State for Education and Science received a letter from the South Yorkshire, Humberside and North Derbyshire in-service advisory committee, pleading for more funding. Its full-time and part-time courses are inadequately funded, which means that we shall not have the skills necessary to compete. That does not bode well for our economic future.

It is not just education that suffers from underfunding. It is apparent in all local authority services. It is estimated that next year Sheffield will be at least £35 million short on its budget. That means that it will be £12 million to £14 million short on its education budget. What sort of a future do we have when we start off with such a shortfall?

I have here an article from *The Star* in Sheffield on the funding of local government and education. It is headed, "The dark ages". I could not put it better myself. Education and services are indeed almost back in the dark ages. I know that the Prime Minister wants Victorian values, but I am not sure that she intends a return to poor educational facilities for our children and students. Perhaps she does. The article states that there will be less cash for

"schools, libraries, parks, swimming pools, sports halls, concerts, road sweeping, refuse collection, housing"

and social services.

Social services are near and dear to my heart. How can we claim to care for our children and elderly when our social workers are under tremendous strain? How can we say to the parents of this nation who are looking after their children that they are to go back to work to make their contribution when child-care facilities are not available? They are not backed up by the resources that should be provided.

Social workers, like teachers, are under tremendous strain. Occasionally, things go wrong. Then some case of child abuse or neglect hits the headlines. Immediately the judges and politicians, particularly Tory politicians, ask what the social workers were doing. We know what they were doing—working with twice as many clients as they should have been.

Time and again legislation has forced local authorities to carry out certain services, yet they have not been given the resources to do so. That applies to the educational curriculum. We do not need to be reminded that people need to be taken care of. Every authority knows that, and asks only for the resources that it needs. I am concerned about children not being properly cared for from the age of four or three, or even younger. Unless we care for them from the very beginning, they can never hope to achieve the standards and skills that this nation needs.

The Government have squandered billions and billions of pounds. They threw that money away or, as in most cases, gave it to their fat friends. Meanwhile, the very fabric of our society and democracy, and our country's future prosperity, are disintegrating before our eyes. The Government's bigotry has ruined opportunities for thousands of our citizens.

I make this special plea. Teachers, social workers, local government officers and councillors are willing and able to undertake the work that is necessary to develop Britain's schools and the skills of our people, but they cannot do that without the right resources. I hope that the Government will one day get it right.

7.20 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (Antrim, North): On behalf of Unionists, I congratulate the hon. Members for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) on their maiden speeches.

As we debate this evening, Ulster is burying her dead. Northern Ireland's present security situation can be described in only one word—carnage. This week marks five years of living under the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Those concerned may note that before it was signed, there was a welcome tapering down of terrorist killings, as was evident in the Chief Constable's report. However, on the signing of the agreement, that agonising and ugly spiral of killings rose sharply.

In 1985, when the agreement was signed on 15 November, there were 54 killings when the year was almost ended. The following year, 1986, there were 61

killings; in 1987 there were 93 killings; in 1988, there were 93 killings; in 1989, 62 killings, and so far this year, 1990, there have been 71 killings. Who can measure the agony, sorrow, heartbreak, hurt and loss behind every innocent victim? We see that heartbreak in the form of a long and ever-increasing procession of maimed and bereaved mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives daughters, and sons, of all religions—for terrorism has no respect for age, creed, or class.

Last weekend, a speech was made by a Roman Catholic priest called Faul in Dungannon, who said that the RUC is full of rogues who are in cahoots with Protestant paramilitaries. At the weekend, my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Ulster (Rev. William McCrea) said that we would soon see the consequences of that allegation—and we did, in the form of four killings.

The figures show that there have been 346 murders in the past five years. Of those, 74·5 per cent. were slaughtered by the Irish Republican Army. Of that number, 119 were Roman Catholics and 41 per cent. of these were slaughtered by the IRA. Those figures are not mine but are official. Forty-one per cent. of all murders by so-called loyalist organisations resulted in court appearances and charges being upheld by the courts—but of all the IRA atrocities, only 11 per cent. resulted in court appearances and charges being upheld.

What can I say about the past few days? On 23 October, a Protestant taxi driver was shot at the Royal Victoria hospital. On 24 October, human bombs at Londonderry killed five soldiers and a civilian driver who had been strapped to his van by the terrorists. Another soldier died in a human bomb attack the same day at Newry checkpoint. Also on 24 October, a Roman Catholic taxi driver was shot in Dungannon. On 26 October, a Sinn Fein member was shot dead in Cookstown, and on 2 November, Albert Cooper, an Ulster Defence Regiment officer, was blown up in his garage in Cookstown. On 7 November, a Roman Catholic was shot in New Lodge, Belfast, and the next day another Roman Catholic was shot at a garage near Stewartstown. On 9 November—a sad day for Ulster—four men were shot dead returning from wildfowling. They were RUC Inspector William Murphy, Reserve Constable Thomas Taylor, former UDR member Norman Kendall, and Keith Dowley, a Department of the Environment water service official.

I listened with interest to the remarks of the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) at the memorial service for Ian Gow at St. Margaret's, Westminster, when he took credit for the Anglo-Irish Agreement—although he did not do so in his speech today—as one of its architects and initiators, and was thus prepared to part company with Ian Gow over that issue. Today, he spoke of the supposed nightmares that would come with Britain's closer association with the rest of Europe.

We in Ulster have had the nightmare, and we are still having that nightmare. I have read of the night of the long knives, but in the House today, we witnessed the day of the long bayonets. I have no respect for a man who did not tell the House today of the contribution that he made to the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may be severe in denouncing others, but, as a spokesman for Northern Ireland, I indict the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East. The blood is upon him and upon his skirts, for the part that he played in what has happened.

I am glad that the people of the south of Ireland are learning, and that the Republic now has a president who repudiates the Anglo-Irish Agreement. That alone may give this House a message, which I hope it will heed. I hope also that the Government will convene the meeting that was postponed on 5 July, when the long hand of the Irish Government stretched into this House and a Minister of the Crown was not permitted to make the speech that he had promised my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux) and myself. I trust that there will be negotiations soon on replacing the Anglo-Irish Agreement with one that will bring some hope and a future to the people of Northern Ireland.

7.27 pm

Mr. Robert Litherland (Manchester, Central): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara), who moved us all with the kind sentiments that he expressed about his predecessor, Sean Hughes. My hon. Friend spoke with passion and knowledge about his constituency, and by tradition, Knowsley has returned a first-class Member of Parliament, who will certainly look after his constituents' interests.

We join the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti), in condemning the evil act that took Ian Gow's life, and we wish him well. He displayed a good sense of humour.

I want to confine my contribution to the subject of infant schools in my constituency. The Gracious Speech stated:

> "My Government will continue to take action to improve quality in education."

Her Majesty would be extremely embarrassed if she realised the emptiness of those words, and if she knew the true state of primary education in the inner cities, I am sure that those words would have frozen on her lips. However, Her Majesty does not write the Gracious Speech, so the blame must be laid elsewhere. My postbag leaves not the slightest doubt about where the blame lies. The letters that educate me of the reality of the situation come from the frontliners—the teachers themselves.

Many aspects of Government policy affect education, and I want to advance the protestations made to me by head teachers from all parts of my constituency because of their concern about the quality of education in primary and infant schools. The pressures and problems facing those schools, teachers and children are of crisis proportions.

A former Secretary of State, now chairman of the Conservative party, when informed of the difficulties experienced in schools in the state sector, said, "Show me the evidence." There was a response to that challenge, and the effects of Government policy on those who work to educate our children have been placed before the Secretary of State. That last magician created the illusion that something would be done, but that was before he vanished into obscurity. There is no doubt that those arguments will also be placed before the new Secretary of State who must provide some answers to the serious problem of quality of education and how teachers can address that without adequate resources to meet the needs of the children.

I sincerely trust that the present Secretary of State will pay heed to what the teachers are telling him. However, if he brings to the Department of Education and Science the same arrogance that he displayed against the nurses,

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doctors and patients in the health service, the situation will become even more desperate. At least the former Secretary of State listened, if nothing else.

Many head teachers stress that the problem has nothing to do with low pay awards. They are not griping about self-interest but expressing deep concern for a profession in which they take pride. Regrettably, that profession is suffering from the negative effects of the stress and low morale felt by teachers.

The pressures are unremittingendless DES circulars demanding immediate response and implementation, demands on top of the national curriculum that have created an increased work load and disruption for all children, hastily organised courses and workshops and weekly governors' meetings. Teachers' partners have complained that family life has been affected by the amount of time that their spouses are having to spend in the evening and at weekends on school work—all at the expense of their family commitments.

One head teacher wrote to me:

"In twenty years of teaching I have never known morale to be so low and so widespread. Staff at all levels, both young and experienced alike, feel that they are being swept helplessly along by a tide of change which threatens their integrity and status as professional educators. I am left with a team of demoralised colleagues who are mentally and physically unable to give of their best in the classroom"

Other head teachers describe numerous and valid problems including lack of teaching support for teachers who have up to 30 children in a class, lack of non-teaching support, lack of support for children with special needs as well as a lack of administrative and clerical support. The list is endless.

Stress becomes more acute in an inner city with all its inherent problems. Teachers suffer from stress-related illness because of the extra burdens placed upon them. They are losing heart and seeking jobs elsewhere. They are losing interest because the Government do not appear to have grasped the seriousness of the problem.

Teachers in the inner city are suffering from a growing disillusionment, especially in those schools in which there are added stress factors. The head teacher of an inner-city special school where the majority of children come from a deprived and disadvantaged background and suffer complex emotional and social problems recently informed me of that disillusionment among his staff. He wrote:

"One very experienced teacher has, despite being a valued and committed teacher, reluctantly requested early retirement, solely because of the increased stress and pressures he feels under the new regime. It cannot be beneficial to the well-being of our children and of the state education system if our more experienced teachers cannot cope or are 'burned out' by these pressures."

The response from the Secretary of State has been pathetic and insulting. He made no attempt to answer the letter in detail. His reply to me and that teacher was patronising in the extreme. He said:

"The teaching profession deserves gratitude, recognition and respect . . . I value their commitment to the pupils"

and so he whines on. They were empty words and empty gestures because at the end of the letter came the inevitable sting—the end of term report. He stated that the Government are providing the necessary resources and support for the introduction of their reforms. He said that he was confident that teachers will strive to raise standards in the schools, in other words, they must try harder.

A similar reply was given to the head teacher of Varna street primary school in Openshaw after he had taken the trouble to explain his dismay to the Secretary of State. He wrote:

"I do this as an experienced and highly qualified headteacher who is increasingly angered and frustrated by the apparent lack of care the Government has for the young children in this country and the total ignorance it displays about the true conditions in which they and their teachers have to work in the schools."

Varna street school is housed in a 90-year-old building on a cramped inner-city site, sandwiched between a railway station, a scrapyard and an old mill. The roof leaks, the windows and door frames do not fit well and water has penetrated through the walls. Despite those appalling physical conditions, the staff, parents and children care for their school.

Children are our future and our greatest asset and best investment. Those who serve the educational needs of the country urge the Government not to destroy the seed corn, but to invest in our kids before it is too late. My speech is a protest from all the head teachers in my constituency who have written to me. The Government must do something, or make way for another Government who do care.

7.35 pm

Mr. Malcolm Thornton (Crosby): I join in congratulating those two hon. Members who made their maiden speeches tonight. I welcome them to the House, but I am sure that they will forgive me if I say that that welcome is slightly tempered because they replace two hon. Members who were widely respected and whom we miss very much.

We have wanted a full day's debate on education for some time. It is a matter of regret that little in the way of constructive educational comment has been made in this debate so far. I should like to add some constructive thoughts and to address the problem we face in education.

The reforms that have been introduced—or certainly the principle behind them—have received a large measure of support. We must recognise, however, that the work required to implement them has had a serious effect on our educational system. I welcome the new Secretary of State, and urge him to reflect upon what his predecessor started to do—he recognised that the momentum of the reforms could be increased by slightly easing the pressure placed upon schools.

It was no coincidence that, in the first few days after the long recess, many colleagues told me that, during the course of their constituency work in the summer, they had received encouraging reports from teachers in many of their schools. Those teachers said that they were getting to grips with the reforms and were starting to implement them and that, in that respect, things were getting easier. I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend will take that on board.

The education reforms can only be delivered by teachers. In the past, I have said that all the political rhetoric in the world does not alter the fact that it is the teacher in the classroom who will deliver those reforms. Much of what we do to develop the education service must centre upon the teacher in the classroom.

As I have told the House before, I have had the great privilege of being chairman of one of the largest primary schools in the country, a group 8 primary school, for 17 years. I am very much a hands-on chairman. I am also

married to the head teacher of a group 6 primary school, so I have had considerable day-to-day involvement with education at the sharp end.

I am a great believer in primary education and I have seen as recently as last week, in Liscard primary school, the marvellous work that is being done to improve standards and implement the essential parts of the Government's reform programme. The work being done on that score is not limited to that one school. Many schools are delivering the commitment, by teachers, of the Government's reforms.

But it would be futile to pretend that the reforms will happen without recognition of the fact that teachers need the support that extra resources into their profession demand. Unless those resources are allocated, as I have said before, the Government's reforms will not be implemented. Successive HMI reports have shown clearly that non-contact time in primary schools is virtually non-existent. If we are to give the amount of preparation time, over and above the time that is already being given by dedicated teachers, there must be an increase in non-contact time, and that has clear resource implications.

I have no brief for LEAs that seek to build empires or create ever more advisory services, but LEAs can have a more dynamic and proactive role in future than they have had in the past, and they should be examining what they provide by way of in-service courses and support services and the amount of support that they can give to the qualitative improvement of the delivery of education in their areas. That does not mean that the warnings of Her Majesty's inspectorate should not be heeded. LEAs should look closely at the balance between the numbers in their administration departments and teaching in the schools.

There has been too much short-termism in education. I have heard much today about the failure of the Government to bring about educational reforms. Nobody can pretend to know anything about education without accepting the leads and lags in education. It takes a long time, perhaps two decades, for policies to work through, and the problems that were sown by woolly thinking and political dogma in the 1960s and 1970s are with us today. They will not be solved by successive Acts that have been passed since the Conservatives came to power. It will take perhaps another 10 years before we reap the full rewards of those benefits. But reap them we shall, and improvements will be seen to be working through the system.

The last HMI report showed that up to 40 per cent. of newly trained teachers felt that

"education studies had received too much emphasis, while the more practical aspects such as teaching methods, classroom observation and teaching practice had received too little."

Much expertise exists in the classrooms of many of the nation's schools. It is more important for the next generation of teachers to be trained by on the job experience, picking up the theory of education when they need it, rather than the other way round.

Initiatives such as the articled teachers scheme can offer much to education. The Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts identified in its work the fact that it is pointless dropping such schemes into the education system and just hoping that it can cope. If teachers are to be mentors and tutors—call them what one will—they must be given the extra resources to benefit from that qualitative aspect of on-the-job training.

The two-year, classroom-based, on-the-job training which the articled teachers scheme gives means that 80 per cent. of time is spent in schools observing, assisting and teaching. What is more, the pay will be better than the one-year PGCE, and that will result in three times more supervised teaching practice, with less indigestible educational theory. That is a practical way forward, which will do much to improve the quality of our teaching force.

Unless we devote the resources necessary to those who deliver education—I am not speaking of ever more resources; perhaps we should be thinking of the better deployment of existing resources—we shall not get the quality of teachers who will deliver the quality of education that the nation needs. They must have support in the classroom. If we give them the necessary support, they will deliver the reforms, remembering that we are speaking of reforms of which hon. Members in all parts of the House approve. Everybody who believes in education wants the reforms to be implemented. There is a practical way forward, and I commend it to the House.

7.45 pm

Mr. Martin Flannery (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I agreed with much that was said by the hon. Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton), but first I pay tribute to the elegant and interesting maiden speeches made by my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti). We look forward to hearing them speak in other debates.

In the 10 minutes allocated to me, I shall speak about education generally before dealing with some specific aspects of education. The hon. Member for Crosby, the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education, Science and Arts, and I have worked together, with other hon. Members who are present, for many years. I regret that my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner), also a member of the Select Committee, was accused of not taking part in education debates. I assure the House that, as a member of the Select Committee, he is a frequent participant in debates on educational issues.

Naturally, we differ on many issues when we debate education. The hon. Member for Crosby did not mention those differences. He simply spoke about the reforms, many of which, in the view of many of my hon. Friends and myself, are deforms rather than reforms, a subject to which I shall return.

Like the economy, the British education system is in deep crisis because of the policies of the Conservative party. They have done so much that is wrong that the Government are now dithering under the attack that is being launched against them. Conservative Members are split in a terrible way, and that split, we now discover, has been reflected in all their policies during the last 11 years.

Parents, local education authorities, which Conservative Members loathe, and governors, many of whom will never be able to carry out the tasks that are allocated to them, are all complaining. I prophesy that many governors will give up their posts because of the responsibilities that the Government are placing, and will increasingly place, on them.

Teachers and their employers are worried because they have too much to do. My hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) came into the Chamber to take part in a debate just before the last Recess carrying a pile of books perhaps 2 ft high and placed them on the

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Opposition Front Bench. They represented reading material for teachers. Teachers do not have time to read that amount of literature. Many teachers have told me that it is absolutely insane to expect them, with all the work that they have to do, to read guff in that quantity.

Hon. Members, especially those with an understanding of education, appreciate that we receive from the Department of Education and Science almost daily a dozen or so pieces of advice on what should or will be done in the future. There is no time to read that amount of stuff. How dare Conservative Members talk about bureaucrats, when that state of affairs has existed throughout the 11 years when they have been in power, during which time they have maligned and abused the teaching profession?

Only when they have seen the degree of damage that they have caused have they begun to change their tune when referring to teachers, who are being worked to death. They are doing more hours than ever before, working during their lunchtimes, having to come in early in the morning and to stay late at night. Not only do many Conservative Members know that what I say is true, but I believe that I see some of them nodding in assent.

The Government say teachers have choice and opportunity, but the Government have constantly undermined their freedom. Teachers feel undervalued and underpaid and have had no negotiating rights for years. The United Nations condemns the British Government for taking those rights away. Resources are short and getting shorter, books and equipment are lacking, hundreds of schools—possibly thousands—are crumbling due to lack of repairs, and the Government blithely deny it. The Government have received £100 million from North sea oil and gained another £30 billion to £50 billion by selling off the family silver. That money has been frittered away, instead of being used for education and kindred problems. Major and minor authorities up and down the country complain bitterly about the so-called local management of schools.

As hon. Members know, the Select Committee produced an important report on the lack of teachers, which the Conservative party would not accept at the time. Local management of schools means that large numbers of teachers have to leave the profession. When the Government talk about putting one body in front of each class, they should remember that, whereas there were often 30 or 40 applications for some of those posts, now there are only one, two or three and the school has to accept a teacher who may have no knowledge of the relevant subject, merely so as to put a body in front of the class.

No previous British Government have ever engaged in such dogma or taken such a doctrinaire attitude. The assisted places scheme and the so-called city technology colleges are two methods of siphoning off millions of pounds of public money into semi-private education, which is private education by the back door. Any idea that a Labour Government would keep those systems is a dream. We shall not keep methods that have cost all that money, at the expense of others. City technology colleges that should have been paid for by private industry are being paid for by us, and the money is taken away from the rest of the education system.

It will be useful if I state how much money the assisted places scheme costs. In the first year, 1984-85, it cost £22 million, in 1985-86 it cost £30 million, in 1986-87 it cost £38 million, in 1987-88 it cost £46 million, in 1988-89 it cost £51 million, and in 1989-90 it cost £59 million. That is £246 million spent on the assisted places scheme. That was public money spent for private education. The Government plan to spend another £62 million in 1990-91, £60 million in 1991-92, £70 million in 1992-93—making a total of £438 million.

The Minister has been boasting about getting £500 million, as though that were wonderful. Do the Government know how much the assisted places scheme and the city technology colleges will cost? By 1993, they will have cost £625 million. The figure is steadily heading towards £1 billion. That is public money siphoned off from the education of 95 per cent. of our children. That is no way to run an education system for 95 per cent. of our children.

The education of the vast majority of our children is in the hands of people who never use the state education system. They can always boast that one or two of them did, but the reality is that they are the same people who would have destroyed our national health service, were it not for the struggle that we have put up, and they never use that service either. They do not understand what ordinary people need. Therefore, they are about to fall because of what they have done to our people—we have seen that coming this afternoon.

The only real hope for this country's education system is to get rid of the Government so that we can work for the education of all our children. The Government have so little faith in the national curriculum that they do not even impose it in all private schools. The law does not say that such schools have to have it. We would put the national curriculum, which we think is good if looked into carefully, into private as well as state schools, to improve the whole of our education system.

7.54 pm

Mr. Anthony Coombs (Wyre Forest): I pay tribute to the hon. Members for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) for their excellent and erudite maiden speeches. I am sure that we shall hear more from them in future.

It is sad, particularly for people who wish to see standards raised throughout the British education system, to see the vacuous and hypocritical amendment tabled by the Labour party. The amendment was followed up by a speech by the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) which did not contain one constructive idea about how to raise education standards in primary or secondary schools. The only major proposal he made was that he would vandalise the high standards now achieved by the grant-maintained schools by bringing them back into the local authority sector. He failed to recognise that, during the past 10 years, spending per pupil in Britain's schools has risen by 40 per cent.—twice as fast as the rate achieved under the last Labour Government, when spending rose by only 11 per cent.

The hon. Member for Knowsley, South spoke of the number of computers in primary and secondary schools, which is indicative of the sort of resources going into schools. Under the Conservative Government, teachers' pay has risen by 30 per cent. in real terms. Under the last Labour Government, it rose by only 4 per cent. in real terms. We have not heard much about training today, but

the Government are spending three times more, after inflation, than was spent 10 years ago. We have the largest employment training scheme in Europe.

Opposition Members talk of a crisis in the education service, but the vast majority of teachers in our schools provide good education. I see that every time I go into schools in my constituency, and to say anything else is a gross calumny on their efforts. Between 1976 and 1988, the proportion of pupils who achieved five O-levels at grades A to C or more, rose from 23 to 30 per cent., the number of 16-year-olds continuing education, either at school or at further education establishments, rose from 42 to 56 per cent. The number of people attending full-time or part-time courses in higher education at present is at a record all-time high of 1 million. That is not prima facie evidence of a crisis of standards in our schools, albeit some of them need to be improved.

As evidence of the durability of the Government's reforms, the agenda is changing. Whereas the national curriculum was once opposed, we now hear those in the Labour party talk about the need for annual pupil appraisals; whereas once the secret garden occupied by members of the educational establishment in the teaching profession was something that nobody could enter, now we hear about the need for statutory appraisal for teachers; whereas open enrolment was once attacked, we now hear of the benefits of competition between schools.

During the passage of the Education Reform Bill, the Labour party attacked the local management of schools, but now many of its authorities, such as Birmingham, are in the forefront of bringing forward pilot schemes to ensure that the allocation of more resources is decided at school level, so achieving greater efficiency and involvement by parents and teachers, and thus higher standards.

The Government recognise that increasing choice for parents and giving them greater control over how their schools are run will inevitably lead to higher standards. That choice is anathema to the Labour party which, as we have heard, wants to abolish grant-maintained schools, strangle the independent sector and abolish the grammar schools, despite the fact that parents in Birmingham are forcing the Labour authority to set up another grammar school. The Opposition would like to abolish CTCs and have even called A-levels—the linchpin of educational standards for the past 30 years—into question.

I wish to offer two examples of how our reforms, leading to greater spending control at a local level, have led to higher standards. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mr. Thornton) I am the chairman of a large comprehensive school—in my case in Birmingham. Since we achieved local management of schools we have been able to increase the teaching force by two teachers and increase the equipment, tools and materials budget by no less than 50 per cent. in one year.

I do not wish to discuss the success of grant-maintained schools in terms of academic results or statistics; I want to discuss them on the basis of what I know from people who are daily involved in them. In Birmingham, the first midlands school to go grant maintained was Baverstock —despite a campaign of vilification by the local education authority and its purblind governing body. Now, according to the headmaster, a school that used to be the local skinhead school, surrounded by competition in the shape of two former and one existing grammar school, has turned the corner and become a place which provides proper education and marvellous opportunity. Grant-maintained status has benefited the school; it has six more staff members than it did when under the education authority. It has a new science technician and even a new school nurse. Every teacher who wants to go for in-service training—teachers pay for it out of the school's budget —can do so. The school has increased its equipment, tools and materials budget by four times. Whereas before it was grossly undersubscribed, a sink school to which no one wanted to go, there are now 400 applications a year for 240 places. Most importantly, whereas before the school had babysitters foisted on it—people who took over from absent teachers—now there are 20 applications for every science post that the school advertises for one week only in *The Times Educational Supplement*.

Given the parental involvement and improved standards made possible by grant-maintained status at Baverstock school, without extra resources and in a deprived area of Birmingham, I should have thought that the Labour party would embrace the idea as one that gives hope to people who could not otherwise attain high educational standards. Instead, the Opposition reject it out of hand.

It is a matter of regret that so far only 44 grant-maintained schools have been set up. I am sure that there will be more and the Government should consider reforms under which governing bodies, after a positive vote to opt out by parents, would have a statutory duty to co-operate with the opting-out procedure, instead of seeking to delay it, as has happened so often.

Greater devolution for education and the higher standards that it brings hold lessons for our national curriculum. Although it is good that more 16-year-olds are staying on at school and that more people are achieving higher standards than ever before in GCSE, there are still anxieties in many urban schools, such as the one that I chair, about the fact that truancy rates of 14 and 15-year-olds, particularly less able pupils, remain high. In our school we have a clear policy of providing BTEC courses, oriented to the world of work and therefore seen as more relevant by less able pupils.

I was glad to hear the previous Secretary of State say in Norwich on 20 October that he was looking at developing policies of more vocational qualifications after the age of 16. There is a strong case for developing BTEC qualifications to run alongside the national curriculum for less able pupils after the age of 14. I hope that the Government will give that serious consideration.

Finally, I make a plea to the Under-Secretary of State for Employment. There is a strong case for giving greater tax relief to people who provide training out of their own——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman must leave it there.

8.4 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): As we are all aware, the Teachers' Pay and Conditions Act became law early in 1987 and at the time the Government insisted that it was a temporary measure, but it has been extended year by year to 1991. The Government were condemned in May

[Mr. Gerry Steinberg]

1988 by the International Labour Organisation for denying teachers their negotiating rights. They have not complied with international law and they have flouted international conventions that they ratified. During the period in which the interim advisory committee has been in operation, and certainly by the end of March 1990, teachers' pay had increased by 2·5 per cent. less than inflation, and a teacher at the top of the main professional grade was more than £400 a year worse off. During the existence of the IAC the pay scale of a teacher at the top of the main professional grade, with an allowance, will have increased by almost 14 per cent. less than the increase in average earnings.

Is not this one of the major reasons why we have a shortage of teachers? A detailed survey of vacancies carried out by the six main teaching unions made it clear that schools have about 10,000 vacancies, yet still the Government will not listen. The Secretary of State refused to listen even before he had sat down at his new desk—for that matter, before he knew where it was. We all know that graduates are not opting for teaching as a career in anything like the numbers needed. Only by removing the IAC and giving teachers back their negotiating rights can the restraints on them be lifted.

The patience of teachers is almost ready to explode, and their morale is at its lowest for years. Proposals in the Gracious Speech to introduce a Bill to establish permanent negotiating arrangements covering teachers' pay and conditions will be very much welcomed, but to be a success any Bill must restore direct pay bargaining between employer and employee. Before I congratulate the Government too much, I want to study the Bill carefully, because I suspect that it will contain a number of stings in the tail.

However quickly teachers get back their negotiating rights, like everything else in this country education and training are in a dreadful mess, thanks to 11 years of this Government. In the 1990s Britain spends less of its national wealth on education than it did in 1979. We are in danger of becoming the worst educated and trained nation in Europe. Beyond the age of 16, Britain's young people have half the opportunities for high-quality education and training that their counterparts in West Germany, the United States and Japan enjoy. That is a disgrace.

Good quality training and education are the best ways of building a flexible and effective work force with high levels of skills which enable everyone to reach his or her full potential. Of all the imbalances in our country, no deficit is more damaging than the gap between the need for and the supply of modern skills. Just one third of 17-year-olds stayed on in full-time education in 1988, compared with two thirds in most European countries.

The amount spent by the Government on training 16 to 19-year-olds is to be cut by £159 million between now and 1992. Surely this is a chance to expand quality, not to make savings. If the Government continue this policy, more opportunities will be lost.

Although 16 to 19-year-olds are undoubtedly the most neglected group in the education system, the problem is wider than that and begins with the basic entitlement to education. Every child should be entitled to pre-school education. Nursery education gives youngsters a good start in life, and after nursery school the under-fives are better prepared both educationally and socially for primary school. Tragically, less than a quarter of Britain's three and four-year-olds get a chance of a place in a nursery school. Fortunately, in my local education authority area of Durham we have a good record because more than 40 per cent. of our children have nursery places. Each year that is increasing, because the county has seen the necessity for such education. Over the next three years there will be a great expansion of nursery provision.

Four-year-olds are being admitted early to primary school, but as a recent HMI report on the education of children under five states:

"Children under 5 in nursery schools and classes generally receive a broader, better balanced education than those in primary classes."

Nursery education is the answer, but the Government refuse to promote it. It is left to Labour-controlled local education authorities to advance the cause of nursery provision. A child in a Labour area has twice the chance of a nursery place than a child in any other area. However, it is no longer enough to rely on the whim and the good will of local education authorities. We need a strategy to increase the opportunity for quality education for all three and four-year-olds whose parents want it. There is nothing in the Gracious Speech to improve that situation.

Half Britain's children are educated in sub-standard accommodation. For a quarter of them the buildings are so bad that Her Majesty's inspectorate says that the children's education is suffering. The previous Secretary of State for Education's £500 million so-called victory means that each school might just get an extra coat of paint. We need between £3·5 billion and £4 billion just to put schools in the right condition. My local education authority in Durham needs £50 million for necessary repairs to schools in the area. This year, only emergency repairs will be carried out because the authority is so short of finance.

I should like to read from the minutes of a governors' meeting at a school in Neville's Cross in Durham. The minutes were sent to me and they state under general comments:

"It was agreed that efforts should be made to have the high ceilings decorated, and the plastering work, carried out professionally. We could then seek the services of volunteers to paint the classrooms etc. and attempt to obtain the paint at favourable rates, free it possible.

Mr. Dodsworth, Mr. Fenwick and myself would like to thank wholeheartedly Mr. Hudson and other members of staff who have given up their holidays to redecorate their classrooms. We would like the Governors to record this appreciation."

Where is education going when teachers have to come into schools during their holidays to carry out decorating? That is a dreadful state of affairs.

Her Majesty's inspectorate recently said that 30 per cent. of our children receive a sub-standard education. The Prime Minister's response was that 70 per cent. were therefore okay. That is a dreadful and uncaring response of the sort that we have come to expect from the Government. The next Labour Government will repeal the opting-out clauses of the Education Reform Act 1988 and will return all such schools, along with CTCs, to the local education authorities. That will start to cut the privilege that the Government so readily hand out. We also need to amend the local managers scheme so that local education authorities can plan more easily the distribution of the resources that are needed and will be needed. It is plain

that at present the system favours the big and already better financed schools, although that is still not saying much for the resources.

On my way here on the train this morning, I read an incredible little article in the *Daily Mirror*. The heading was "Schools Kept Going by Raffles." The article states:

"Teachers and parents with kids at Britain's hard-pressed schools are learning about a new version of the three R's . . . raffles, raising money and redecorating. They are digging more and more into their own pockets to help schools starved of cash by local councils."

It is incredible that teachers have to spend more time trying to raise money than they spend teaching our kids. That is disgraceful.

There can be little argument about the importance of raising education and training opportunities and standards for 16 to 19-year-olds. In Britain it is the norm to leave school at 16. It should be the norm to obtain as many qualifications as possible. The number of 16 and 18-year-olds in full-time education or college-based training must be doubled and opportunities widened, thereby increasing the number of youngsters with access to higher education.

While the Government speak of doubling the numbers in higher education in 25 years, they reverse direction——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to have to stop the hon. Gentleman. It is amazing that I have had to call so many hon. Members to order this evening. There is just half a minute left once the digital clock changes.

8.16 pm

Sir David Mitchell (Hampshire, North-West): As a preliminary to what I wish to say about education, I should like to speak about the benefits of choice and competition. Ten years ago, our internal air services were a British Airways monopoly and the service was known as the shuttle. It was utilitarian in the extreme. There were no meals, tea, coffee or papers. Then we licensed British Midland to fly in competition with British Airways. That gave choice to the user and ended the British Airways monopoly. Overnight, the shuttle service died and in its place was born super-shuttle. On that service passengers receive a newspaper when they arrive. There is a hot breakfast, free tea, coffee and drinks throughout the day and passengers count as people of importance.

Five years ago, buses were utilitarian, moribund local monopolies. There were shrinking services, huge subsidies and no innovation. At that time no one outside Exeter had seen a minibus. We deregulated and introduced competition. Costs tumbled, services improved, and minibuses appeared in countless towns all over Britain. That was innovation for the benefit of the customer.

A year ago, the doctors' new contract provided for per capita pay. The more patients a doctor had, the more he was paid. That was the start of competition in the national health service. Now the average doctor spends four hours a week more with the sick, the elderly and the dying than he did a year ago, and 75 per cent. of doctors have started or increased preventive health clinics.

Choice and competition put suppliers of goods and services on their toes and they constantly seek to improve the standard of what they provide. Choice and competition are the great motivators for improving the lot of the customer, the user and the consumer.

However, when choice and competition are proposed there is opposition from the monopolists. The workers, the unions and their political friends and the owners and management all fiercely defend the retention of the status quo and oppose the opportunity for competition. Every ingenious argument is produced, and withering scorn is poured on those who dare to attack the concept of a continuing monopoly.

If courage is shown and the monopoly is challenged, the benefits to the user are immense. That leads me to my argument that choice and competition is a valuable aid to education. We now have or will soon have the national curriculum defining what a child ought to know. We have testing at the ages of seven, 11, 14 and 16 to monitor whether a child knows the subjects that he or she is studying. That also provides an opportunity for extra teaching and coaching where such a need is shown to exist. There are objective data for comparing one school with another and there is parental choice. We do not yet have enough state schools offering free state education but run independently of the local education authority monopoly. We need more of these grant-maintained schools. In practice, they have substantial benefits such as more cash under the control of the governors; on average some 15 per cent. more.

I have here a tale of administrative overheads. There is a dramatic difference between those in the private sector and those in the public sector. Hampshire is one of the better counties in terms of its costs and overheads, but over one third of the staff employed by the local education authority are not employed in teaching—a fact that is both unbelievable and staggering. The private sector in education would have nothing remotely like that proportion taken up by non-teaching personnel. Grant-maintained status would also give governors the opportunity to trim their overheads and have a higher proportion of their staff as teaching staff.

Grant-maintained status will also give governors greater freedom of action, will improve teacher numbers and ensure self-management by staff and governors who are answerable to parents. I pay a tribute to the teachers in my constituency who are exceedingly professional. I have great respect for the standard of their dedication. Many of the schools in my constituency are so good that they would stand up well in a fully competitive system as grant-maintained schools.

Mr. Paul Boateng (Brent, South): How many have opted out?

Sir David Mitchell: I am coming to that. It is wholly desirable to raise standards, using the spur of choice and competition. Already, applications for school places in grant-maintained schools have increased by 40 per cent. That is a sign of parental confidence in the system.

I come now to the point that was half raised in a seated intervention. I warn any who seek to follow this path that they will need as much political courage as those who have tackled other monopolies and secured large benefits elsewhere. Experience teaches that there will be fierce condemnation at county level, just as unscrupulous, ingenious and determined as any in industry in which we have broken monopolies. Even officials, who should be neutral in this matter, leaving policy to be made by the elected representatives of the people in the county, will in many cases be directly involved in campaigns of twisting arms of governors and frightening parents to ensure that a school does not go down that road.

[Sir David Mitchell]

Should a school go down that road, what huge benefits there will be for the children and for the standard of education. Grant-maintained status will ensure that those concerned will have in their own hands the management of the school, which will be answerable to the parents and which will set standards that will be higher than those anywhere else.

8.22 pm

Mr. Tom Pendry (Stalybridge and Hyde): I add my congratulations to our two maiden speakers, who made excellent speeches. Listening to them, I wondered what would happen when the gloves were off, given that these were supposed to be non-controversial speeches. I shall welcome such speeches.

I recognise that those who instigated this debate and therefore chose its title had in mind a debate on education and training in its narrow context. I shall broaden the meaning of training and refer to an important need in training provision, which has been highlighted by the social services inspectorate in its report on the Rochdale child abuse cases. The Gracious Speech committed the Government to improve the quality of the health and social services. The inspectorate's report made it clear that the resources allocated to the training of our social workers is woefully inadequate.

I welcome the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Mr. Michie), who spoke passionately on this subject. Those of us who have witnessed, as we all have, I dare say, the heartbreak of parents deprived of their children in such cases know how vital it is that tight codes of practice are in place for those social workers, police, education authorities and medical professionals involved at the sharp end of this difficult and sensitive problem. Recently, I had two fathers in my surgeries who were quite distraught at how they had been handled during the delicate process of investigation that surrounds such cases. I know that social workers would welcome extra resources and help in this sector. It must be a top priority.

National vacancy rates for social workers average 10 per cent., with 14·5 per cent. in London and up to 30 per cent. in some boroughs. The Government have accepted figures produced by Professor Adrian Webb for a local government training board working party that argue that, although there is an output of 4,300 social workers a year, this still leaves a shortfall of around 700 a year. However, that is way below the figure envisaged by the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, which estimates that, if we are to meet the needs of the statutory, voluntary and private sector, we need at least 5,000 new holders of the diploma in social work. This qualification trains students to develop and demonstrate a defined knowledge base, core skills, professional values and competence to practise as a social worker. It is a two-year course, which was introduced in 1988 following the Government's rejection of proposals, made by the council, for a comprehensive three-year course.

The Government's refusal to accept that three-year course has had major consequences. The British Association of Social Workers, for example, tells me that the United Kingdom is the only EC country where social work training fails to meet the Commission's directive on higher education diplomas and qualifications. That is a scandal which needs addressing. In the absence of a three-year course, it is imperative that the existing qualification is fully resourced, improved where necessary and given the backing required to meet the needs arising from the vast increase in statutory duties that results from the 50 Acts passed since 1970.

The British Association of Social Workers is asking for signs of the Government's commitment to the profession. The Government must take at least three steps to allay its fears. First, they could publish a target figure to make up the shortfall in numbers of social workers and to make an early announcement of that target number of social workers to qualify each year. Secondly, they should commit additional resources to assist in providing adequate practice teaching opportunities. Thirdly, they must support an advertising programme showing social work as a career in the same way as nursing or teaching. By these measures, the Government would show some commitment to higher standards of treatment and care by social workers and training and resources for them.

The reference in the Gracious Speech to improving the quality of health and social security would be laughable if it were not such a serious commitment. How can the Labour party, or the country at large, take that pledge except with a pinch of salt, when we see how Ministers dodge and weave and alter rules and regulations to avoid paying legitimate claimants their just deserts? I have a case with which to illustrate my point.

My local authority, Tameside, firmly believes that the Minister of State is playing cat and mouse with severely disabled people. Its principal welfare rights officer, Alan Franco, has told me that, on behalf of the council, he was the first to highlight the Government's inconsistencies under the Social Security Act 1986. He successfully represented a 26-year-old Tameside man who is severely handicapped. When he applied for another 150 such cases to be paid in the borough, he was firmly told that DSS officials had instructions to refuse all further claims but to pay any claims that were successfully pursued in local tribunals. In effect, this meant that only severely disabled people with a knowledge of social security law and access to expert advice would be paid the severe disability premium.

The local authority lodged a test case with the Social Security Commission to settle the issue. Unfortunately the cat, in the shape of the Minister with responsibility for severely disabled people, noticed that the mouse, Simon Crompton, a man with Down's syndrome, might succeed in setting a precedent for severely disabled people. Therefore, he chose to amend an obscure proscriptive regulation, the net result of which was to limit the implications of the eventually successful test case to the period April 1988 to October 1989. Nevertheless, arrears of up to £1,955 became due to similar claimants. Once again, the Government cat moved to frustrate the hopes of severely disabled people throughout Britain.

Paragraph 7 of schedule 6 to the Social Security Act 1990 came into force on Friday 13 July, the intention being to bar claimants who approached the Department of Social Security after that date from receiving the arrears due to them. Local DSS offices were instructed, however, to review all the cases known to them before that date and to pay the arrears due. The performance of local offices in carrying out this instruction can be judged from the reply

to my parliamentary question by the Minister of State, who is laughingly called the Minister for Social Security and Disabled People, on 15 October.

First, I congratulate the staff of the Mansfield office, who identified and paid 145 claimants. That office was top of the league. Can the Minister account for the 55 local offices that could not find one severely disabled person on their case loads? The generosity of the Wilmslow office should not go unnoticed. It found one eligible claimant, and then paid him or her £3·75. That example alone illustrates how the Government do not look after the disabled. The reference to the disabled in the Gracious Speech must be seen in that light. Whoever we finish up with as Prime Minister in the next few days will make no difference. The disabled will be looking for the entire Government to go, and soon.

8.31 pm

Dr. Ian Twinn (Edmonton): Having listened to Opposition Members, I am left with a nagging doubt whether they have any positive contribution to make to a debate on education. We have heard nothing but a diatribe of baseless criticism. It seems that they have nothing positive to offer. The Government's reforms in the Education Reform Act 1988 have, however, been based upon positive and firm principles. First, they were designed to introduce nationally agreed higher standards in our schools. Secondly, they were designed to give parents freedom of choice for their children and teachers freedom of choice professionally to run the sort of schools they want, with parental support.

I hope that our reforms will not be about prescribing too much from the centre—from the Department of Education and Science and from education establishments—how schools should be run, given the broad aims which the Act is designed to achieve.

Nor should our reforms be about the structure of education. Good schools—successful schools that bring out the best from all their pupils, whatever the quality and the education of the pupils going into them—will be found in inner cities in Victorian buildings just as much as in single-class rural schools. They will be found in traditional grammar schools, in comprehensive schools and in secondary modern schools such as the one which I attended. Regardless of the structure and the name of the school, much will depend on the quality of leadership from the head, the governing body and the staff, and on support from parents. Our reforms are aimed at allowing that to happen in our schools.

Freedom in schools has been enhanced by local management. I was distressed to hear this evening that Opposition Members want to end, to control or to rein in all local management and to claw back funds to the centre again, to allow bureaucrats in our city halls and county halls to take more money away from the teaching of pupils, so that more money can be spent on advisers and the friends of the education establishment, who offer so little that is constructive to help our schools.

It is true that many head teachers and other members of staff are worried about local management of schools. That was true in my constituency. My ear was bent on many occasions when I visited schools. It was felt that those concerned did not have the skills to manage their schools properly. That is not surprising, because for many years head teachers have been denied the opportunity to manage their schools. Our reforms have set them free to do that. In my experience, heads are struggling, but they are on a learning curve. They do not want to return to the time when they did not control their budgets.

Mr. Boateng: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Twinn: No. The hon. Gentleman will have to contain himself.

Head teachers will not want to return to the period when they could not control their budgets, when they had to ask county hall or city hall—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I cannot hear the hon. Member speak.

Dr. Twinn: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is typical of Opposition Members that they should want to stifle a debate when an attempt is made to draw attention to what happened in the past.

When I was the manager of a primary school that came within the Inner London education authority, my colleagues and I had time and time again to go to county hall to ask for a simple repair to a window, for example, to be performed. We had to ask the head to spend all her time trying to get such repairs made. A head can now get a window repaired himself or herself. Heads can save money from their own budgets. They are able to control their budgets so that they can increase investment in their schools by having the staffing that they want.

The *Daily Mail* has done us a favour today in exposing what has gone wrong in education authorities. It has drawn attention to the ratios of teachers to education staff. The neighbouring authority to Edmonton is Haringey, and it is not surprising that each day refugees troop over the borough boundary from Haringey into Edmonton to get away from the destructive elements in Haringey schools. Parents vote with their feet whenever they can in moving into my constituency. I am proud of that, but I want to see schools in Haringey set free from the local authority and given the freedom to manage themselves.

The problem is not confined to local level; it is to be found also at national level. There is a problem with the education establishment trying to hold on to too much control. I think that it is nervous about losing the grasp that it now has on education policy. I am concerned, however, that the national curriculum is too detailed. It does not leave enough freedom for teachers to develop their professional skills and to use their own experience to teach what they need to teach.

I am concerned that testing is too burdensome. I feel that it goes well over the top of what is necessary for teachers and parents to understand what children are learning in school. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South (Mr. MacGregor), who was Secretary of State for Education and Science and who is now Leader of the House, on his action in cutting down the testing of seven-year-olds. I hope that the DES will continue to simplify some of the excesses with the implementation of our reforms.

A reform of the A-level system may come in future. I believe that A-level examinations provide a high standard of testing for those who are academically gifted. They provide, as far as possible, a means of testing which is independent of the school in which a pupil has been

[Dr. Twinn]

taught. They are independent of the ability of teachers and of their assessments. It would be a tragedy if we lost the independence of the A-level system.

I was not especially impressed by the arguments that led to the disappearance of O-level examinations and the introduction of the general certificate of secondary education. After experience with the GCSE system, it is doubtful whether one examination can usefully test all ability ranges. It is fundamentally dishonest of us to try to fudge together systems which pretend to do that. Let us not make the same mistake with A-levels.

Study in depth at A-level standard of two, three or four subjects provides the basis of our higher education system. If we destroy the level of knowledge and development and depth of study at A-level, we are in grave danger of finding ourselves with four-year degree courses. There is nothing to be gained by students remaining in higher education for four years. I spent much of my time as a higher education lecturer engaged in four-year degree courses. A three-year course is perfectly adequate for undergraduate training. I do not think that money is available for us to introduce widespread four-year degree courses. It is a warning not to meddle with a system of 16-plus examinations that works well. Certainly it could be improved, and there is room for course work assessment, although I hope not too much. There is still a place for final examination assessments that, as far as possible, provide a benchmark of ability across the nation.

Sixteen-plus examinations need to be expanded. The A-level examination is not suitable for everyone. There is a strong need for vocational training within schools, not just within colleges. I was glad to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Coombs) arguing for the wider use of BTEC in schools and the introduction of more BTEC training running parallel with the A-level in the sixth form. My authority has a collegiate sixth form system for the borough, under which colleges and schools come together to provide a much wider range of vocational and academic training. It is a useful model for urban areas where that sort of co-operation can work.

The Labour party has not offered the House very much, whereas my hon. Friends have offered positive and constructive ideas on how the reforms can be put into practice, how they are already working to improve choice in our schools, and how they are providing freedom for parents and for teachers. All we have heard from the Opposition is that they want to destroy the remaining grammar schools, end assisted places and scrap the grant-maintained schools and the city technology colleges. Let them explain how that intolerance of choice will enhance education.

8.41 pm

Mr. Dick Douglas (Dunfermline, West): This has been a remarkable parliamentary day and I regret that there is such a sparse number of Members now present. Labour Members have clearly said that whoever becomes head of school, if they had a free vote they would support the present headmistress. There is no doubt that it is in their interest to retain the headmistress.

There was a statement about the abandonment of the duopoly, but one of the duopolies most irritating to Back-Benchers like me is the monopolising of time by Front-Bench spokesmen in their opening and closing speeches. They made more than two-and-a-half hours of speeches when opening today's debate, yet Back-Bench speeches have been curtailed by the 10-minute rule. It is a ridiculous misallocation of time.

Whatever the insularity of this place, it is the English Parliament. There has been a great deal of talk about changes in education, but hardly a word about universities —I think that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) mentioned them in passing—and hardly a word about education and training. I intend to spend most of my time dealing with further and higher education, with particular regard to Scotland. I make no apology for that. If Scotland gains its independence in Europe, we will make higher and further education a top priority—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) may laugh, and I do not pretend that I would not have been sceptical about that some years ago. But I say to him, "Watch Paisley, my boy, because that will wipe the smirk off your face."— *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) should not mumble from a sedentary position.

Scotland has more young people going into higher education than any other part of the United Kingdom— more than one in five. It is an essential part of that structure that we retain and advance the essential features. First among them is the relative openness of our centres of higher and further education to all classes in society. Some Conservative Members spoke about choice, but that depends very much on the locality in which one is born. I am one of the few hon. Members who left school at 14. My choice was not to go into further or higher education, but to go into the shipyard. I left school on the Friday and started work on the Monday. It does not make me better than anyone else, but it illustrates the limitation on choice. If choice is to be extended, the opportunities must be expanded by keeping higher and further education as free as possible.

One of the other features of choice in Scotland is the method of attaining the relevant educational qualifications in the post-compulsory school years which has operated in harmony with the general openness. We cannot oppose the setting up of the Howie committee to review the aims and purposes of such qualifications, but it would be a retrograde step to place any additional disincentives in the path of students who wish to attain the appropriate qualifications to go on to higher education.

I am surprised that most English Members drew no comparison with Scotland's qualifications for going into higher education. We are jealous of the Scottish higher. As has been said, it is as certain as anything can be in social science that at least part of Scotland's advantage over England and Wales can be attributed to the fifth-year higher. That is possibly under threat. Any recommendations emanating from Howie must be examined against the need of Scotland to expand access to higher and further education and against the background of a decline in the numbers of the relevant age group coming forward in the immediate future and the possible increasing attractions of going straight into the labour market.

During the past 20 years, Governments of all colours have imposed restrictions on universities, and they have had a severe impact on the ability of our centres of higher learning to retain their place as attractive employers and as leaders in fundamental research—an area in which we are living on the seed corn. I have no intention of speaking for

the universities in England and Wales. I should declare an interest as I am a member of the court of Stirling university. Any of the principals and vice-chancellors of Scotland's eight universities would say that they were worried about the status of their institutions as centres of research.

I know that universities are teaching institutions, but research is fundamental, not only for them as institutions of higher learning, but for retaining people of the appropriate calibre that will provide a spin-off to the teaching function. If research disappears, so do other aspects. I accept that an increasing amount is being provided for the research budget, but let us compare it with the £2 billion that is spent on defence research and development. That is under attack, and if it is cut, the effect will be felt in the south-east and the midlands. The shortfall will not be made up by private institutions. They will not fund fundamental research in the universities because they mainly fund applied research. Therefore, the universities will continue to be severely worse off in fundamental research funding.

It is no exaggeration to state that a whole generation of suitable lecturers and researchers have turned their backs on academic life and found employment elsewhere. Industry has proved much more attractive. If anyone doubts that, he should examine the continued decline in the proportion of academic staff under the age of 35 in universities. It is clear that they have failed to attract sufficient numbers of men and women of the appropriate calibre since the Government came to office.

Even with North sea oil and gas, the regeneration of Scotland's industry and commerce will demand more skills and more training. That means that education and training must be a top priority, and Scotland's priorities cannot be set by English standards.

There is no Scottish Minister present, so I hope that what I am about to say on education and training will be passed on. I am concerned that Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and the local enterprise companies are employer dominated. If employers of an appropriate calibre are to be involved, they will not be able to devote enough time to running their businesses. That is the quandary. If they devote time to education and training, they will desert their businesses. The danger of such an employer-dominated organisation is that employees will be trained for jobs that are in decline, not the jobs of the future. For example, shipbuilding employees who dominated an LEC might have trained people to be riveters when welding was coming in or shipbuilding was in decline.

I have recently been talking to entrepreneurs, stalwarts in industry, particularly Clydeside. I shall not mention names for fear of embarrassing them. Their training was almost non-existent, but they are real men of character. One told me that he went to night school five nights a week as well as studying at the weekend. He is a man of great repute in shipbuilding. He was trained by an antiquated process, but we in Scotland cannot afford to retain such a process and we will not do so. An independent Scotland would set its own priorities which will meet the challenge of 1992. An independent Scotland within the EC would build on the standards and devotion of the education establishment. We will not be curtailed by the laggardly approach that has been adopted south of the border.

8.51 pm

Mr. Quentin Davies (Stamford and Spalding): The Labour party has recently targeted education and training for the coming election campaign. It has been wisely said —the adage is one that we all intuitively believe has much good sense in it—that the best and most sincere form of flattery is imitation. Therefore, Conservative Members would be less than human if they did not derive some gratification from the fact that, albeit somewhat belatedly, the Labour party has followed us down a path that we have been taking steadily for a number of years.

When history comes to be written in future centuries, one of the great achievements of this Parliament will be the Education Reform Act 1988, which is quite the most thorough educational reform since Butler's Education Act in 1944. That was some three years before the Labour party apparently woke up to the enormous importance of education. That Act followed many years of internal discussion in the Government and in the Conservative party among interested professional groups and educationists on exactly the detailed form that those reforms should take.

Fully a year before the Labour party woke up to the enormous importance of training, we had introduced the TECs, a completely new, radical and promising structure for managing the country's future training effort and the Government's important continuing contribution to that.

I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will not spend too much of their valuable time worrying about what the Labour party is saying, because its judgment in these areas has often proved to be wrong. Nevertheless, for what it is worth, we may take some encouragement from the Labour party's attitude in recent months. We should not be so churlish as not to welcome it. We should be extremely glad that it now sees the good sense of devoting effort and energy to these two areas of policy, as we have been doing, certainly since I have been a Member of the House and for a number of years before that.

I take this opportunity to dwell on some of the essential principles of our reforms and the programme to which I have referred. Our education policy had essentially three aims. The first was to improve standards up to, and we hope, beyond the best international levels. Secondly, we thought that the best way to achieve that improvement in standards was to increase parental choice and competition between schools to ensure that schools felt that they were responding to a genuine market place, living up to the expectations of their consumers, the parents. The third great aim that completed the essential structure was to devolve powers from the local education authorities to the schools.

All our reforms—whether strengthening the powers of head teachers and governors; open enrolment and abolition of the previous pernicious system of catchment areas, to which the Labour party has been wedded for a long time; the introduction of the national curriculum and assessment tests at seven, 11 and 14; or the introduction of GCSE—relate directly to one of those three aims, which hang together as an essential and coherent whole. That will, I believe, be the formula for a major secular improvement in Britain's education standards.

I make one point which might serve to underline the importance of the two elements of devolving power to individual schools and opening up schools to parental

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choice. We sometimes hear from the Opposition that independent schools enjoy an advantage over maintained schools. I do not believe that that is or has been generally true. Nevertheless, we are now enabling schools, where they so wish, to become essentially independent schools, responsible to their own governing bodies and dependent on the continuing support of the parents whose children they continue to attract.

The only essential difference between a grant-maintained school and an independent school will be that, instead of the parents sending a cheque at the beginning of term, the Government will send a cheque. Under that structure, it will be possible for a number of different educational institutions to emerge, all of them holding their heads high—affording priority to different aspects of education, no doubt, but building their own authentic traditions, which will become proud traditions, and setting their own standards. That is, and has always been, the way to nurture educational institutions. That is how our great grammar schools emerged in the late middle ages. I have no doubt that we can look forward to a new era in education—an era holding enormous promise.

I have already said that one of our great reforms in this Parliament has been in training. Conservative Members are the first to acknowledge that the key decisions on training—and, indeed, the key contributions to the costs of training—must come from the private sector. I do not know whether the Opposition believe in the private sector; we receive conflicting signals on the subject. But if they believe in the private sector, and if they believe that it is a fatal mistake to think that bureaucrats can second-guess the decisions of those involved in an enormously disparate market, they should welcome what we have done with the training and enterprise councils.

We should welcome the fact that we are moving away from a bureaucratically driven training system under which the Government are supposed to take the lead not merely in providing but in directing resources. I hope and trust that the Opposition will welcome the establishment of the TECs—a system for focusing the initiatives of local businesses on the training programmes undertaken in their areas. That is an enormously important change.

It is well known, I think—increasingly well known, I hope—that the Government are spending about twice as much public money on training as the Labour Government were spending when they left office. No Conservative Member is likely to fall prey to the illusion that is so prevalent among Opposition Members that simply by spending more one gets more value—that increased input automatically yields proportionately increased output. That is a fatal—and, I fear, a simple-minded—illusion. It is also a very dangerous illusion and one that can be very expensive. We should be the first to acknowledge that it is not enough to increase the training spend. We must ensure that money is spent as effectively, or more effectively, than it has been in the past.

The first stage of that process has been to ensure that employers direct the spending of the Government's contribution to the national training effort. That is being achieved already and I can testify that, in Lincolnshire, the TECs are taking up their new powers with great enthusiasm.

The second stage in the process is to enable individual trainees increasingly to drive the system—hence the importance of the pilot scheme for training vouchers. It is a pilot scheme and it would be quite wrong to prejudge the results of it, although personally I am confident that those results will be positive and that that, too, will form a permanent part of the training efforts of the future and will give new hope to millions of our young people.

9.3 pm

Mr. Ian McCartney (Makerfield): This is not the first occasion on which I have had to follow the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) and I are somewhat notorious for our response to the hon. Gentleman's views on the marketplace. The hon. Gentleman has had the pleasure of serving with me on almost every Standing Committee on which I have served. Tonight, he has plumbed new depths in his pursuit of market philosophy: he has turned schools into warehouses and children into commodities.

In the previous two Committees on which we have served, the hon. Gentleman has set great store by the privatisation of electricity and housing. He now seeks to apply market philosophy to education, turning children into commodities and saying that schools should operate according to the rules of the marketplace. He is not merely turning the clock back to Victorian times: as he suggested, he is taking us back to mediaeval times. That says a lot about the Conservative party.

Today has been historic and not only because my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) made a compassionate and telling speech both about our friend, his predecessor who died so young, and about the work that is being done in deprived areas such as Knowsley by Labour local authorities to provide training and educational opportunities for many young people and children. Today is also historic because I believe that, for the first time in parliamentary history, the resignation speech of a Prime Minister was delivered by the deputy Prime Minister.

In this debate, my party has been painting a picture not only of where we are today in terms of Government policy towards training and education, but of where we want to go, as a political party, after the next general election, and of the opportunities that await my hon. Friend the Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) in that new Government as he takes forward our training proposals.

Labour Members are not new to this subject. We not only have the experience of lifetimes spent in industry, but many of us in the past decade have been running successful training schemes on behalf of local authorities and in partnership with the private sector, the public sector, voluntary organisations and trade unions. Through those partnerships we have brought back new jobs, new opportunities and new skills into areas of dereliction that have been rejected by the Government.

That has been done in partnership with local authorities with resources provided by them at a time when the Government have consistently reduced the resources available for training. Let us look at the Government's sorry record. According to the latest Government expenditure round this year, there will be a cut of £365 million in the training budget. Apparently, the Minister who will reply to the debate is happy and is rejoicing in the

fact that his own budget has been cut by £365 million. Next year the cut will be £350 million and in 1993-94 it will be £357 million. We are seeing the "zero option" in the Government's training policy because, by 1994, the Minister's Department will be spending almost nothing on employment training projects for people such as the long-term unemployed and those with special needs.

As I have said, many of us have spent the past decade working in local government and trying to provide training resources in our areas. My own Wigan metropolitan borough and Newcastle are the only two boroughs to have been chosen by the EEC Commission to set up pilot projects for developing training initiatives with the private sector, local authorities and other public bodies. We have built on the experience of that original initiative several years ago by developing new TECs, information technology centres and the new centre that is now being set up under Metro TEC.

Our view of training is quite different from that of the Government. We believe that any training system must first be effective at a local level. There must be strong local participation from industry and commerce; the public and the voluntary sectors; local authorities, including local education authorities; colleges, and women's organisations. It must involve the unemployed, especially those with special needs and the long-term unemployed, which is the very group that the Government are rejecting out of hand, as can be seen from the massive cuts in the already meagre budget. We want to see training at a local level which will identify the needs of the local community, both in terms of business and those people who require training, whether to move into industry, to make a new start in industry or to enter industry direct from education.

We want to promote the principle and philosophy of training. Britain is saddled with an industry—this applies to both large industries and small businesses—in which training is not regarded as a major component of a company's philosophy. We want to promote and identify the benefits of training, not only to the community, but to the company and to its long-term needs in terms of its employees. We want to prioritise training because the Government's policy on training—I am talking not only about cuts in the budget, but about the schemes themselves and the changes made in them, year in, year out—has not only resulted in our being an unskilled nation, but has led to organisations in both the public and private sectors not knowing about the schemes that they can provide from year to year. For that reason we cannot develop a training network nationally, regionally or locally which meets the needs of industry and the community.

We cannot train for the 1990s and the next century by changing the system according to the financial requirements of the Treasury year in and year out. There must be an absolute commitment to the training needs of the nation, especially young people, women returning to industry and special groups within the community. Unless that is recognised and there is a commitment to training over not one year or five years but a decade, the changes that we need to see will not take place and we have a continued piecemeal relationship between training in the community and the needs of industry.

We must take serious measures to help the short-term unemployed. It is the view not only of the Opposition but of the Confederation of British Industry and other bodies independent of the Government that we are heading for a recession deeper than that of the early 1980s. Unless we take measures to help the short-term unemployed, they will quickly become an ever-increasing pool of long-term unemployed. Therefore, we must provide resources at the local level to deal with the short-term unemployed.

We must also consider the interests of people with disabilities. That means providing specific resources to encourage large and small employers in both the public and private sectors to employ disabled people. It is no good simply setting a national norm for the employment by private companies and local authorities of people with physical or mental disabilities unless we provide the financial incentive to allow that to happen. We must include in the training programme incentives for companies to employ disabled people.

We must also widen access to women who wish to return to the workplace. From now until the turn of the century and beyond, there will be a growing need to encourage women back into the work place—not to work on the tills at Asda or Tesco but to do increasingly skilled work. That work should not be part-time but part of a growing spectrum of jobs for women. To do that, we require resources to give women access to training and employment. That means providing resources at local level to examine the provision of child minding. Unless child minding is part and parcel of the local philosophy of training, many women will be locked out of the labour market and prevented from taking advantage of local training schemes.

There is much that needs to be done. We need a national consensus on training. Without a consensus between those employed in industry and employers and unless the needs of young people who want to enter industry are met, all that we shall see is a growing spiral of unemployment and a pool of short-term unskilled labour. That will increasingly enable our overseas competitors to steal our markets.

The position is dire, but an incoming Labour Government will not only tackle the issue but turn it round. That is what the public want. They want to get rid of this Government and have a Government committed to training and education.

9.13 pm

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): If we needed any evidence of the paucity of the Government's arguments in response to our amendment opposing the measures in the Gracious Speech on education and training—I suppose that we should call it education, training and employment—we were given it in the speeches that we heard tonight.

We heard from the hon. Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies). He was the ideologue called upon to tell us all about competition, the marketplace and all the doctrinaire attitudes which he contends are part of the Government's philosophy. I am sure that the Ministers on the Front Bench must have been extremely embarrassed by that speech. Clearly, that is not what they want the general public and the world at large to hear. They want the presentation to be more subtle and appealing.

The hon. Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. Pawsey) spoke about the terrible militancy of teachers and their organisations. He said that they had adopted unprofessional and unethical tactics. Another hon. Member talked about bureaucrats as those little people in town halls up and down the country who were causing

[Mr. Dennis Turner]

unimaginable problems for our education service. That has been the tenor of the speeches from Tory Members. In a word, it is called scapegoating. That have no answers to the problems.

We have seen through the Government's Education Reform Act 1988. We reject most of the arguments on which they have based their policies. We reject opting out, open enrolment and other measures in the Act as being divisive. The Government have ideological reasons for their policies—to divide and rule. Many of their policies are based on that premise.

Parents, teachers and governors all tell us of the daily problems facing them. I cannot cover the whole education service, but there is no greater problem than that of post-16 education. Even the Government agree that that must be tackled. The whole area is fragmented. I asked the previous Secretary of State for Education and Science to create a royal commission to evaluate all the problems and the missed opportunities that should be grasped in the post-16 education sector.

I make no apologies for being in favour of tertiary education. It comprehensively delivers the great benefits of vocational and academic learning. It assists youngsters over 16 to stay with it. Nevertheless, 50 per cent. of our youngsters decide at 16 to take no further part in higher or further education.

Would it not be possible tonight just for once to hear from a Minister his appreciation of the teachers and lecturers in our schools and colleges who deliver education to our youngsters? Could a Minister couple with that an appreciation of those who have again been attacked tonight who work in our civic centres to provide services to our population? Welfare officers, school psychologists, school staff and those who sort out the grants that must be made to further and higher education institutions give of their time and energy to help create the education system that we all claim we need.

Turning briefly to training, I hope that the Minister does not equate 82 individual training enterprise councils with the provision of a unified, co-ordinated, national, training plan, because that certainly is not the case. I know from my constituency of the contribution that employers are making in that training and enterprise plan and of how they are assisting the Government in their objectives. However, those councils, which have employers placed on them, will have appeal for the well-motivated youngsters who are capable of achieving qualifications.

I ask the Minister what is to happen to the broad swathe of youngsters who are not so highly motivated. I have in mind the 16-year-olds who need to be personally encouraged to undertake further education. Under the Government's plan, they are likely to be left on the sidelines.

You have appointed in Wolverhampton a chairman of the training enterprise council who is chairman also of the health authority. I ask a question that I have asked you before.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Turner: How can a person who has been appointed to those two major posts contribute sufficient time and energy to them both? When will you say——

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I call the hon. Member to order, to remind him that he should observe the common courtesies when referring to other hon. Members.

Mr. Turner: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker. I ask the Minister again to examine that situation. In Wolverhampton, one person has responsibility for both the training and enterprise council and the town's health service. It is impossible for one person to do both jobs adequately. If the Minister takes his plans seriously, he should carefully examine the situation to which I have drawn his attention.

9.21 pm

Mr. Tony Blair (Sedgefield): I have pleasure congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) on their excellent maiden speeches. My hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South made, by common consent, a superb contribution. He began by paying a moving tribute to his predecessor, Sean Hughes. As my hon. Friend knows from his conversations with many right hon. and hon. Members, Sean Hughes was very highly regarded by the House, and his loss is felt not only by the Labour party but throughout the country.

I was delighted to support my hon. Friend at one of his press conferences during the by-election, at which he demonstrated his total command of the constituency, when the most taxing question he was asked washow large his majority should be, and he showed his good sense by refusing to answer. In fact, he had an excellent majority, which is a tribute to him. My hon. Friend spoke well on the subject of education, in which he has a distinguished record. He spoke with passion, intelligence, conviction and knowledge of his locality, and we look forward to hearing many more contributions from him.

The hon. Member for Eastbourne united the House by expressing strong sentiments about his predecessor, Ian Gow. We all felt sadness at his loss, and outrage at the manner of his death. The hon. Member for Eastbourne spoke about the needs of his constituents in education and community care, and argued his case well from the point of view of his own locality. The hon. Gentleman also made a distinguished contribution to our debate, and we look forward to many further speeches from him.

There is a consensus in Britain today that the 1990s should be the age of the trained, and that we will succeed or fail by the skills and learning of our people. The debate was about whether the mood of the country is matched by the commitment of the Government. We start from weakness, not strength. Last year, the Confederation of British Industry called for a skills revolution, and in its evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee in May this year, it described as "a considerable challenge" the skills crisis that Britain faces, and warned that the skills gap "may even be widening."

Less than a year ago, the Department of Employment itself published its "Training in Britain" study. That study not only found that one in five employers provided no training, but that two thirds of the carefully taken sample of almost 3,000 people had received no training at any time in their employment, or none within the past three years. Almost half identified training needs that were not met, and 40 per cent. expected to receive no further training for the rest of their adult lives.

That report has been borne out by all other subsequent reports on skill shortages and their extent. In September, the Training Commission, shortly before it was wound up, conducted interviews with some 4,000 establishments employing more than 25 people. Two things stuck out from that report. The first was that almost half those enterprises experienced recruitment problems in 1989—for 40 per cent. it was a severe problem—and that nearly all of them expected their problems to continue. Secondly, the areas in which the skill shortages existed were engineering —mechanical and electrical—vehicle manufacturing and textiles, and, for those enterprises in the public sector, shortages were encountered in the health service.

Those shortages have been confirmed by virtually every subsequent report. The Manpower Employment Agency found just a few weeks ago that 44 per cent. of all employers claimed skill shortages—that figure rose to 100 per cent. in the construction industry. Technicians and engineers are most in demand.

A recent survey of small businesses and their skill shortages showed that one fifth had experienced severe skill shortages and one in 10 said that that was the most important problem they faced. Those shortages were identified in manufacturing, construction and financial services. Chambers of commerce have also recently drawn attention to our skill shortages.

Our analysis of jobcentre vacancies for the latest quarter showed that in 60 key occupations—in science, technology, manufacturing and production processes—jobs took much longer to fill than on average—sometimes several months. In the past few days, another group of independent consultants published a review of engineering skills in Britain. It found a staggering 8 per cent. annual shortfall in engineering graduates. By 2000, the Engineering Council believes that we shall require another 200,000 engineers to cope with advances in technology. That report also showed that, by contrast, in Germany there was already a surplus of engineers. Surely that is what is crucial. The skills gap is not just a tragedy for the individual whose potential is unfulfilled but a crisis for the nation that needs that potential to succeed.

It is not merely the absolute level of training in Britain that should concern us, but the level relative to our main competitors. A few months ago, a report by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research compared us with Germany. It showed that we were behind in virtually every category of skills, from metal manufacturing through to kitchen furniture and the training of shop assistants.

In August, Hilary Steedman published a study of workplace qualifications in Britain and France between 1979 and the present day. In 1979, France had similar levels of intermediate vocational qualifications to Britain. Now France has pulled ahead, so that 40 per cent. of its work force have those qualifications compared with 26 per cent. in Britain and 64 per cent. in Germany. As a result of fewer young people staying on at school in Britain, and poor vocational training when they leave school, the number of young people who obtain craft qualifications has remained constant in Britain, but increased by 50 per cent. in France.

Report after report demonstrates the extent of the problem. In October 1990, the Institute of Manpower Studies published a report that showed how many fewer 16-year-olds there were in full-time education in Britain than there were in France, Germany or even Spain. A recent report in relation to Germany showed that it may have as many as 10 million more qualified people than Britain.

What can we see from those reports? We see, first, that we suffer major skill shortages in Britain and, secondly, that they are in the very areas where Britain's balance of payments problem is at its most acute. There could be no more established link than between the failure to invest in training and the failure of our overall economic performance.

There may be signs of change in the attitude of employers. We are pleased that the latest CBI survey shows that employers are not cutting training investment. There may be signs of improvement in the attitude of individuals, showing a greater awareness of the benefits of training. But the question is whether the Government are prepared to make that commitment to training and skills.

Even before the autumn statement, Government programmes were in major difficulties. There were cuts often of 15 to 20 per cent. in youth training programmes, and that happened right across industry. Hon. Members have received representations about national bodies cutting training places and making trainers redundant in youth training. In that sector, there is already a serious crisis.

In recent weeks, the Industrial Society has published a report saying that, four years after the National Council for Vocational Qualifications was set up, 58 per cent. of personnel managers had not heard of the new national vocational qualification system, let alone taking part in it.

As for the industry training bodies, the sectoral bodies vital for Britain's future, a report published by the Department showed that only just over half of them were fully effective in their sectors. Yet the former Secretary of State correctly said, when setting the targets for the upgrading of skills, that all those sectoral bodies should be fully effective by the end of 1992.

The Select Committee on Employment said in its May report in relation to training for the unemployed that nobody even knew the number of employment trainees who got proper qualifications, and that there should be an increase in spending per trainee. So before coming to the autumn statement and considering the response of the Government, we see that Britain has a low level of skills, that it is experiencing major skill shortages, that that is an absolute phenomenon compared with competitor countries, and that, although individuals and employers are showing additional commitment, the Government are already experiencing difficulties with their programmes.

That is the background against which we review the autumn statement. What is the Government's response to the skills crisis? In the coming two years, they will cut training in Britian by £500 million. It is scarcely conceivable to imagine anything less responsible or less in the future interest of the country; £300 million, 10 per cent. of the budget, will be cut in the next year alone. Altogether, from 1987 to 1992, we estimate that £1·6 billion, or one third of the entire budget, will have been cut. Taking account of inflation this year, not even the Department's budget will stand still compared with last year's plans. Even worse, the cuts will be targeted on the long-term unemployed, the most vulnerable in society.

The Secretary of State says that he simply wishes to change the shape of the employment training programme, but the criticism of employment training was that it was not overfunded but underfunded. Employment training

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was set up not because people did not believe training to be essential for the unemployed but because they thought training was critical to enable them to get back to work.

A recent OECD report called for an increase in the training budget devoted to the long-term unemployed. To replace employment training with a better scheme would be one thing; to cut employment training and put nothing in its place is a cruel betrayal of the most vulnerable in society.

Those cuts will be profoundly damaging to training. Even if they were justified in the programmes, as the Minister said, and we could save resources in existing systems, surely any sensible Government would not use that as an excuse to take that money out of the training budget, but would use it in the training budget to upgrade the skills of people in this country.

Let us think of the uses to which, with a little imagination, we could have put that additional £500 million. We could have had a new initiative to improve the quality of training and the system of national qualifications, and a programme to target women returners and extend child care facilities. We could have revitalised the sectoral training organisations that are not effective at present.

We could have had a proper, in-depth analysis of skill shortages, and a crash programme to deal with them, a system of incentives to upgrade the training of those already in work, an initiative to improve management training, one of the core skills that we so desperately need to improve in this country.

Those are some of the missed opportunities of the autumn statement. The stark hypocrisy of the Government's position is surely shown by the fact that the very advice they tender to industry—"When in a recession, don't cut your training budgets"—is advice that the Government have ignored.

Reading ministerial comments, one might think that our competitors were ahead but that we were catching up. That is a fundamental error. Our competitors are not standing still. Italy is increasing its spending on training this year. Germany has conducted a review of its dual system of apprenticeships to see how it can be made more flexible, major changes are being made with the active consent of unions and employers, and standards are being set even higher than before. The French intend to increase spending on training in the next two years by more than 35 per cent., and are launching new initiatives for people in work and young people.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blair: I am sorry, but I must get on.

We must be the only country in the EC that will be cutting investment in training in the very year before the single European market. In Japan, the face of training is undergoing another transformation. The technology revolution is being replaced by the people revolution, in which the development of the individual at the workplace, of which his or her learning is merely a part, becomes the pivot on which each enterprise turns.

To inculcate that new culture in Britain requires a new approach, a revolution in attitude. We believe that it must have at its heart two principles. First, it will require the active involvement of Government, in partnership with industry. Training and enterprise councils cannot become a means of passing responsibility from Government to industry but should be a means of sharing that responsibility within a national training policy. Secondly, it cannot be achieved by a Government dogmatically wedded to a purely voluntary approach. Tory Ministers will exhort, but not oblige. They are cheerleaders, but not players.

Every year, 100,000 or more young people leave school and go into work without any training. In France or Germany, that would be unthinkable, if not unlawful. What is good enough for France or Germany should be good enough for Britain.

Mr. Butcher *rose*——

Mr. Blair: Our belief is that training cannot be left to market forces. On the contrary, the failure to train has been a failure of the market, and that failure needs urgent action not complacency.

Less than a year ago, the previous Secretary of State described Britain's skills crisis as a mountain to climb, but such language has gone. Instead, we are told by the new Secretary of State that we face "a golden decade". I confess that when I first heard the Secretary of State say that on the "Today" programme, I thought it was a mere passing eccentricity, a piece of early morning exuberance, but he repeats it every time he speaks.

Presumably a golden decade starts with a golden year, which presumably starts with a golden month. Let us look at the autumn statement this month: falling investment, falling output, rising unemployment and a cut in the Department's budget. What a way to start a golden decade. That sort of hyperbole is the final refuge of a failed Government who have lost the will to tackle our problems and who fall back on denying their existence. A golden decade cannot be begun by a party which, as we saw earlier in the speech by the former deputy Prime Minister, is fundamentally and irrevocably split on the issues of the day. This is no longer just a party of competing personalities; it is a party of warring factions locked into internal conflict, while the interests of the country go unattended.

If it were merely that the Prime Minister was isolated from her party, the solution for the nation would be clear: remove the Prime Minister. But when the Prime Minister is seen as the leader of a wing of a party divided and isolated from the country, then the only solution is to remove that party from government. That is why I say that this Government in all their policies—not only in education and training, but in the health service, rising interest rates, inflation, the balance of payments and rising unemployment—have created no social cohesion and no economic prosperity. They are no longer fit to govern the country. They are out of step abroad and out of touch at home, and the sooner they are out of office the better for the country.

9.40 pm

The Secretary of State for Employment (Mr. Michael Howard): I begin by congratulating the hon. Members for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) on their excellent maiden speeches. All hon. Members will want to associate themselves with the tributes that they paid to their predecessors, Ian Gow and

Sean Hughes. We miss them both deeply and they will continue to be missed for as long as there are Members in this place who remember them.

It is always sensible to consider the charges and counter-charges that we hear in debates such as this in context and proper perspective. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Science outlined at the start of the debate the great strides forward that we have already made in education and the foundations that we have laid for further radical improvements in the near future. Most speeches in the debate were directed to education, and my right hon. and learned Friend will want to give them careful consideration.

In training policy, too, despite the objections of the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair), we have made great progress in recent years. We are the only Government in the whole of Europe to guarantee a two-year training place to every young person who needs it. Investment in training by employers has risen to record levels. In recent years, employer contributions to youth training have increased fourfold and the number of employees receiving on-the-job training has risen by 70 per cent. in five years. A higher proportion of our young people have degrees than do those of France, Germany or Japan. We have attained a rate of productive growth over the past decade which outstrips that of every other major country except Japan, and we have achieved a record number of jobs—2 million more than in 1979.

Of course, none of this means that we can rest on our laurels. We have secured a sharp increase in the proportion of our youngsters who go into further education or training at the age of 16, but we need to do better still. So we shall introduce a world first next April—training vouchers. *[Laughter.]* Opposition Members laugh, but training vouchers for young school leavers are designed to achieve precisely what we were asked to consider by the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner). They are designed precisely to enable 16 and 17-year-old school leavers to take advantage of the training opportunities that are available to them. In 11 pilot areas next year, school leavers will each be issued with a voucher that they can use to purchase training of their choice for the career of their choice. Each voucher will have a face value, typically of about £1,000, and the value of some will be considerably more than that. Those vouchers will entitle young people to training at further education colleges or with other training providers, at the workplace during the day or elsewhere during the evening.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding (Mr. Davies) appreciated, this voucher initiative will give young people the choice, the buying power and the incentive to train. I hope and expect that the 11 pilot projects will succeed, giving us an opportunity to consider expanding them to other parts of the country.

Mr. Turner: I should not like to be excommunicated from my beloved movement. Will the Secretary of State confirm that I never gave him any reason to believe that I support vouchers? No hon. Member could say that in my speech I said that I supported that part of the Government's policy. I hope that all hon. Members will note that.

Hon. Members: Withdraw.

Mr. Howard: I did not accuse the hon. Gentleman of favouring vouchers. He did what his party always does. It identifies the problem but never identifies a solution. The hon. Gentleman waxed eloquent on the problem. We have a solution to that problem and we are implementing it. We shall deal with the important problem that the hon. Gentleman was entirely right to identify.

The amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition speaks of choice and opportunity. We are creating choice and opportunity of a kind and to an extent that young people in this country have never had before. The vouchers will be issued by training and enterprise councils. Right across the country, more than 1,200 top business leaders, all of them chairmen or chief executives of their own companies, have come together to form training and enterprise councils. Those TECs represent an unprecedented degree of co-operation between Government and employers who are dedicated to the cause of transforming attitudes towards training and enterprise in their areas.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, South-East was right when he said that 82 local training and enterprise councils do not represent a unified approach to training. We think that training should reflect local circumstances and that the way to tackle the problem is to give local training and enterprise councils the discretion that they need to meet circumstances in their own areas. My hon. Friend the Member for Stamford and Spalding was entirely right to emphasise the role of employers in this exercise.

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that one of the ways that young people will use these welcome vouchers will be for computer training? Does he further agree that the creation of information technology centres is one of those excellent training initiatives that the Labour party is determined to abolish?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend is right. The quality of training is steadily increasing and, as employer contributions to it steadily increase, the quality will improve even more.

All 82 training and enterprise councils in England and Wales have now entered at least the development phase, completing the national network a full two years ahead of schedule. Half of them are now fully operational. I pay tribute to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), who is in his place. This was his initiative, and we owe him a great deal for the striking progress that has been made.

Training and enterprise councils will ensure that decisions about training policy are taken in the most responsive and effective way, because they will be taken at local level by employers who know the jobs that are available, those that will become available and the sort of skills that are needed to fill them. They are bringing into this sector the enthusiasm, the dynamism and the efficiency of the private sector. They will ensure that employer commitment to training continues to increase, that the training provided for young people and the unemployed leads directly into jobs, and that small and growing businesses receive the local support and advice they need as they get off the ground.

The hon. Members for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) and for Sedgefield referred to the CBI's target. Both of them were

[Mr. Howard]

sadly out of date. Last month, the CBI published its consultative proposals on targets. It expressed the hope that the Government would welcome this initiative. Within days, I had issued my strategic guidance for the —*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will those hon. Members having private conversations please take them elsewhere?

Mr. Howard: In that guidance, I welcomed the CBI's initiative. I did what it suggested would be appropriate and I defined the responsibilities of all those who have a role in this sector—Government, employers, the TECs, and training providers.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield waxed indignant about the autumn statement. Let me put the record straight. Next year, the Government will be spending broadly as much on training, enterprise and vocational education as we are spending this year; two and a half times as much, in real terms, on training as the last Labour Government and a considerably higher proportion of GDP on Government investment than the United States, Germany or Japan.

Mr. Rhodri Morgan (Cardiff, West): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Member for Sedgefield did not give way once, I have given way twice, and I must get on.

We shall be increasing planned spending on youth training and the technical and vocational education initiative, and providing £18 million more for the areas piloting training vouchers for young people.

We have secured major increases in the financial flexibilities available to training and enterprise councils, reflecting the major priority of the TECs themselves, and ensuring that they will be able to secure significant increases in value for money for the taxpayer.

They will, for example, be paid by results—by the number of people they train who get jobs or qualifications —for at least 25 per cent. of their youth training and employment training work.

There will no longer be any limits on the periods of training in ET or YT, and they will have a single flexible budget for encouraging enterprise in their local area.

We have also significantly increased the responsibilities of the TECs. They will take charge of our £105 million work-related further education programme. They will be able to bid for some additional resources to launch or extend education-business partnerships. TECs will have a powerful influence over the way in which the TVEI develops in our schools. This package reflects and protects the priorities that the training and enterprise councils wanted themselves.

We have also reviewed the provision of our services to the long-term unemployed. Recent detailed surveys show that up to half of the long-term unemployed already have qualifications, often matching those required to fill local vacancies. We have taken into account sharp falls in the level of long-term unemployment by 60 per cent. since 1986 and by 20 per cent. over the last year alone. Against that background, we have given fresh consideration to the ways in which we can best help the unemployed back to work. We are widening the range of services available to them. We are creating 100,000 new job opportunities to help people back into work. We have stressed that we will fully honour our guarantees under youth training and employment training. We have gone further, expanding the aim group to include for the first time unemployed people with disabilities.

The hon. Member for Sedgefield has been very agitated about these changes. So let me ask him this: is he saying that we should never review the ways in which we can best help the unemployed back to work? Is he saying that, if the results of that review show that we can help them more effectively at lower cost, we should not implement it? Is he saying that we should have ignored the clear evidence that training is not always the right means to help the long-term unemployed back into work? Should we encourage people to go on training courses that may not be appropriate for their needs, when other more effective programmes could be offered to help them?

There are clear choices about training policy facing this country, and the Government's view is clear. If the Opposition are to carry any credibility, they must tell the House where they stand. For example, do they believe in a voluntary or a compulsory approach? For 20 years, we had a compulsory approach to training in this country. We had levies, we had training boards—we had all the panoply of coercion. It failed. Does the Labour party want to return to that? Labour Members appear to be incapable of making up their minds on the issue.

Last year, the Opposition's policy review was clear and explicit on these matters. It stated that a Labour Government would introduce a jobs tax of 0·5 per cent. of payroll to be paid "by all enterprises". On 6 February, the Leader of the Opposition made a speech in which he said that the Labour party would listen to the views of business men in making up its mind about the jobs tax. The CBI then made its view of the jobs tax very clear. It said that it would be

"a nuisance and an irrelevance."

On 12 March, the hon. Members for Sedgefield and for Blackburn launched a policy document on training which did not mention the jobs tax. Two weeks later, on 26 March, the commitment returned. When I challenged the hon. Member for Sedgefield on it in the House, he even said that it would be a policy of "sanctions" against employers. Then the Leader of the Opposition made a speech which we were given to understand meant that the commitment to a levy had been dropped.

The Labour party brings to this issue a huge amount of confusion. I hope that the hon. Member for Sedgefield will take every opportunity to explain to the House and the nation exactly where it stands on this issue.

I have already described to the House the initiative that we have taken in setting up training and enterprise councils throughout the country. The hon. Member for Sedgefield has said that he supports the TECs because—I quote his welcome words—

"there is one great advantage and that is that they have managed to generate an awful lot of enthusiasm among employers".

That, the hon. Gentleman says, is "essential".

The essence of the TECs, and the reason whey they have generated such enthusiasm among employers, is that they are employer-led bodies. That is because employers are best placed to identify the training and enterprise needs of their areas. Does the hon. Member for Sedgefield support this approach, or does he support the view which is set out in his policy document that these bodies should

be representative? Does he support the view of the hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), who said that these bodies should be representative and that they should be packed with trade unionists, local authority delegates and others, to dilute the leading role of employers?

The hon. Member for Sedgefield cannot have it both ways. Will he commit himself to support TECs as they are now composed or does he intend to change their very nature? Will he tell us today where he stands?

The policy document of the hon. Member for Sedgefield states that TECs are to be the arms of a centralised training organisation called Skills UK, which the Opposition propose to set up. It is the essence of TECs, however, that they should be independent. Does the hon. Gentleman support this approach? Or does he support his party's policy document, in which it is stated that TECs should be the arms of Skills UK? Will he tell us today where he stands? Will he tell us now? I hope that he will disown his policy document. I hope that we can have consensus on this vital issue. These are crucial questions and we are entitled to have them answered.

The Labour party's record on training is a lamentable one. That applies to the record of Labour Governments and to the Labour party's record in opposition. The Opposition have opposed every training initiative that the Government have introduced. They opposed YTS, YT and ET.

A few days ago, I had a constructive encounter with the hon. Member for Blackburn. The hon. Gentleman came to see me because he was concerned about the funding of TVEI in his constituency. He was concerned that his constituents should not be deprived of the benefits of this excellent programme. Happily, I was able to set his fears at rest. But what happened when we introduced TVEI? The Labour party conference passed a resolution condemning it as

"a divisive new form of educational segregation".

The Opposition's shadow education spokesman of the time went throughout the country denouncing it because he said it was fit only

"for hewers of wood and drawers of water".

That shadow spokesman is now the Leader of the Opposition.

The Opposition amendment speaks of choice and opportunity. We have provided an unprecedented range of choice and opportunity. Each choice and each opportunity has been opposed by the Opposition——

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put and agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 225, Noes 337.

Division No. 1] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allen, Graham
Alton, David
Anderson, Donald
Archer, Rt Hon Peter
Armstrong, Hilary
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack
Ashton, Joe
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Margaret
Beith, A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Bellotti, David
Benn, Rt Hon Tony
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*
Benton, Joseph
Bermingham, Gerald
Bidwell, Sydney
Blair, Tony
Blunkett, David
Boateng, Paul
Boyes, Roland
Bradley, Keith
Bray, Dr Jeremy
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*
Buckley, George J.
Caborn, Richard
Callaghan, Jim
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Canavan, Dennis
Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Cartwright, John
Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clay, Bob
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Donald
Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crowther, Stan
Cryer, Bob
Cummings, John
Cunliffe, Lawrence
Cunningham, Dr John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Alistair
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Dixon, Don
Dobson, Frank
Doran, Frank
Douglas, Dick
Duffy, A. E. P.
Dunnachie, Jimmy
Eadie, Alexander
Eastham, Ken
Evans, John *(St Helens N)*
Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Fatchett, Derek
Fearn, Ronald
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fields, Terry *(L'pool B G'n)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Grant, Bernie *(Tottenham)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Haynes, Frank
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Paisley, Rev Ian
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence

Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Worthington, Tony
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Llin Golding and
Mr. Allen McKay.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butcher, John
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, John, *(Luton N)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cope, Rt Hon John
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Critchley, Julian
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Curry, David
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dicks, Terry
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fallon, Michael
Favell, Tony
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Finsberg, Sir Geoffrey
Fishburn, Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Hogg, Hon Douglas *(Gr'th'm)*
Holt, Richard
Hordern, Sir Peter
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurd, Rt Hon Douglas
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Maples, John
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, Rt Hon David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Needham, Richard
Nelson, Anthony
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon Chris *(Bath)*
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rowe, Andrew
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sainsbury, Hon Tim
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shelton, Sir William
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*

Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'Yord)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Ward, John
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir George Young and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.
It being after Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.
Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

Princess of Wales RAF Hospital, Ely

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[*Mr. Kirkhope.*]

10.17 pm

Mr. James Paice (Cambridge, South-East): I am grateful for the opportunity of this Adjournment debate, because on 4 August this year, the year in which we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the battle of Britain, I was one of thousands who celebrated in the city of Ely the 50th anniversary of the Princess of Wales Royal Air Force hospital—a hospital which was founded before the dark days of 1940, but which ever since has been part of the life of the community and the city of Ely, and a hospital to which, only three years, ago Her Royal Highness Princess Diana gave her name.

In those 50 years, very large sums of money have been raised for the hospital. Many RAF personnel have retired to live in Ely. Indeed, on a number of occasions medical staff have left the service to become practitioners in the national health service in Ely. However, over the last few weeks there has been a cloud over that hospital, with rumours that it is to close. We know that the Surgeon General has been carrying out a review of all military hospitals. We know, of course, and everbody welcomes the fact, that, as a result of the end of the cold war and the abolition of the iron curtain, it has been possible for us to reduce defence expenditure. We heard in the House only last week about the way in which those savings are being channelled by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor into the important services that we all value so much. It is followed by today's announcement of the closure of two large RAF bases in Germany, which bodes somewhat ill for tonight's debate.

If the rumours are right and Ely is to be closed, it would be sad and ironic that the widely acclaimed and welcome changes in priority spending, which I entirely support, should be at the expense of the people of Ely and their health care. There are two other RAF hospitals in Britain —the Princess Alexandra hospital at Wroughton and the Princess Mary hospital at Halton. In disciplines, there is little to choose between any of them. Ely and Wroughton have casualty and accident and emergency units and Halton does not. Halton has nuclear medicine and oncology units. Ely has renowned skills in tropical diseases. That stems largely from the fact that East Anglia's regiments were at the forefront of the fighting and subsequent imprisonment by the Japanese in the far east. Even today, many ex-prisoners of war of the Japanese still attend Ely for treatment.

The actual numbers of patients from the services treated show clearly that Wroughton is the largest hospital. But more importantly in this context, Ely has consistently treated more service personnel than Halton. Only once in the past five years has Halton treated more service personnel in-patients than Ely. In every one of the past five years, Ely has treated considerably more out-patients from the services than Halton. In the past year, it has treated 3,000 more out-patients than Halton, and in the year before it treated 3,600 more. That is service out-patients, not dependants or NHS patients. So that discrepancy of 3,000 disproves any claim that Ely's location is inconvenient. On top of all that, there has been

[Mr. James Paice]

massive public investment in facilities at Ely—£9 million in the past six years. That includes a complete new theatre block, costing £4·5 million.

As we all know, rumours feed on each other. Originally, it was rumoured that RAF Halton had been selected for closure and Ely was to remain open, for the very reasons that I have described, as the most modern hospital which was best able to provide the full range of training for RAF staff. The rumour has now been reversed, and it is said that Ely is to close. The cynics believe that it is because Halton is a rather grand hospital and the home of so many senior RAF and retired personnel.

I am the first to recognise that simply treating NHS patients is not a justification for keeping an RAF hospital open, but it is essential that the treatment of those patients is considered as part of any review of the hospital's future. The RAF provides a notional 65 beds across all specialties for NHS patients in the Ely area. It has a major out-patients department and, most importantly, a full accident and emergency casualty unit.

The next nearest casualty unit to Ely is at Addenbrookes in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant). That is some 24 miles away, on the wrong side of Cambridge. When I checked the journey in my car at the weekend, I found that it is a good 45-minute run. To expect people in villages in the constituencies of my hon. Friends the Members for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss) and for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard) to be taken all that way can have only one effect—greater risk to their lives. Indeed, only last week someone was seriously injured on the Littleport bypass, and it took 45 minutes for the ambulance to reach him. If it had had to return to Addenbrookes, he would have had to wait over one and a half hours before receiving treatment. That would be unnecessary risk to human life.

The hospital at Ely provides acute surgical beds, acute medical beds, a coronary care unit, acute obstetric and gynaecological beds and, of course, pathological and radiological services to doctors in the area. If people did not have this facility they would have to go at least 24 miles to the next nearest facility. For the doctors in the area, that would mean a considerable delay in treatment.

In 1988, 5,247 NHS patients were treated as in-patients, more than 31,000 as out-patients and over 6,500 through the casualty unit. You will see, Mr. Speaker, from all those figures, that the loss of these facilities would have a catastrophic effect on the health services provided to the people of Ely and the surrounding areas. In recognition of that, the local paper, the *Ely Standard*, organised a petition, which I have with me. This petition, with 15,000 names, was presented to me in Ely last Saturday. It urges and begs the Government to ensure that these facilities are retained for the use of the people of Ely.

I shall try to be constructive about the future of that hospital. We could start by looking at a combined NHS and military hospital—a hospital with a military wing, such as has been so successful in Belfast. Yet another rumour is circulating, which is that the RAF would wish to have a military wing at a different hospital in Cambridgeshire. If the rumour is true, and if that were to happen, it would be an immense insult to the hospital and the people of Ely. I and many others would resist it vehemently.

There is the possibility of the NHS and the private sector having a joint operation to run those facilities. By far the most sensible course is that the hospital should be set up as a free-standing NHS trust. That would be a first-class opportunity for the Government to demonstrate beyond all shadow of doubt what we on this side of the House know: that this aspect of our NHS reforms not only can but will work and will prove to be the salvation of this hospital.

I recognise that there is a capital asset tied up in Ely hospital. I recognise also, as we all do, that the Treasury will look for receipts from that asset. However, it is not beyond the wit of man to find some mechanism whereby community gain and development can go hand in hand, to the advantage of the Treasury and, more important, to the advantage of the people of Ely. It would make absolutely no sense for these modern facilities to be lost with more than £9 million of public money invested in them in the past few years. There must be a way to ensure that we keep them, preferably under the RAF but, if not, certainly in some other guise, so that they are available for the treatment of any NHS patient in my constituency and those of my hon. Friends.

We are awaiting an imminent decision by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment about the location of a new settlement of initially 1,500 houses, probably rising to 3,000 houses, which means an additional 10,000 people. We know that it will be within five or six miles of Ely. Ely, Littleport, Soham and other nearby settlements expect to take many hundreds of extra houses as part of the current structure plan. It would be ludicrous if this health care resource were to be lost to those people. Fenland people have long memories, as I have come to know in my years of helping and representing them. The loss of this hospital would not be quickly forgotten.

I am looking at my hon. Friend the Minister who is to reply. I am sure that he will recognise the strength of my arguments. I hope that I can leave here tonight able to tell the people of Ely that their hospital—they consider it their hospital, although it is nominally an RAF one—has a future. I hope that I will be able to inform them also that they can look forward with confidence to their future care.

I hope that you, Mr. Speaker, will recognise my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss), who has worked closely with me and in the campaign that has been waged so far, and whose constituency boundary comes within a few miles of the hospital. I know that he too supports the case that I made tonight.

10.29 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (Cambridgeshire, North-East): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) for the opportunity to contribute to his very important Adjournment debate. I congratulate him on his success in securing it, and on the excellent and persuasive way in which he made the case for his constituents and mine.

Before the 1983 boundary change, the Royal Air Force hospital was in the Isle of Ely constituency, but when the city of Ely was taken out of that constituency, it reverted

to north-east Cambridgeshire. The virtual boundary between my hon. Friend's constituency and my own is close to the hospital, and its catchment area includes a substantial proportion of my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Norfolk, South-West (Mrs. Shephard).

At the heart of the matter is not that the presence of the RAF hospital is crucial but that the existence of a hospital is vital. The RAF connection is, of course, important. It is valued by and has the affection of the people of Ely and its environs, and the community think of the hospital as their own—as Ely's hospital. I cannot emphasise enough that it would be most unwise to underestimate the strength of local feeling.

My hon. Friend the member for Cambridgeshire, South-East drew attention to the substantial growth of housing and development earmarked for our area under the Cambridgeshire structure plan, and the settlement that he mentioned is in my own constituency, near the village of Wilburton.

I believe that there are four options. The people of Cambridgeshire would, I think, vote for the status quo. If that is not achievable, the second option would be a revision of the current situation, taking into account Ministry of Defence considerations for greater NHS funding. Thirdly, the district health authority could take over the facilities. Finally, the district and regional health authorities could revise their priorities and the provision of health care in our area. They could utilise the existing facilities either wholly or in part, and adopt my hon. Friend's excellent suggestion for establishing an NHS trust to run the new hospital. I assure my hon. Friend the Minister and the House that such a development would have the overwhelming support of the local people.

Whatever decision is made, it is imperative that the various agencies and Government Departments work in harmony with the local authorities, district and regional health authorities, general practitioners and the Treasury. The Ministry of Defence—more specifically, the RAF—has a long and distinguished association with Ely and the surrounding areas which has been reciprocated by the local people, and which has developed over the years into a very fruitful relationship to mutual advantage.

The people of Ely, north-east Cambridgeshire, south-east Cambridgeshire and south-west Norfolk seek an assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister that the Ministry of Defence will not abandon the community's health needs to the forces of uncertainty and doubt but will co-operate in working for the continuation of health facilities at Ely, in some form or another.

10.33 pm

The Minister of State for the Armed Forces (Mr. Archie Hamilton): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) for raising the issue of the future of the Prince of Wales RAF hospital, Ely. I am also grateful for the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, North-East (Mr. Moss). I am well aware of the keen interest that they have consistently shown in the hospital and in the contribution which it makes to the provision of treatment for national health service patients in the Cambridge district health authority. I am conscious that their interest is particularly shared by all those hon. Members with constituents who have had occasion to use the facilities of this RAF hospital. It is helpful to have this opportunity to explain some of the background to the review of service hospitals to which my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East referred and to remove some of the uncertainty that arises when there is speculation about decisions of this nature.

As my hon. Friend will be aware, the hospital has a long and distinguished record of service covering the past 50 years. It was constructed between 1938 and 1940 in response to the requirements of the second world war. During the war, there were nearly 50 operational flying stations in the area from which it drew its patients. As the pattern of casualties during the war became established, Ely became one of the national centres for the treatment of burns.

With the changing requirements in military and civilian medical treatment, the hospital is now smaller than in its heyday and able to help with the treatment of a number of NHS patients which has been of great assistance both to individuals and the local health authorities. The out-patient and casualty departments were opened by the Princess Royal in April 1963. The hospital was granted the freedom of the city of Ely in 1977, and in July 1987 it was renamed the Princess of Wales RAF hospital during a visit by Her Royal Highness.

The hospital has therefore given fine service and been justly honoured. There will be many who are indebted to it for its contribution to the service and civilian communities over the years. Nevertheless, despite its fine record in the civilian community, it is a service hospital first and foremost and its future has to be determined against the current needs of the armed forces.

It may be helpful if I now say a few general words about the role and function of service hospitals. The Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force medical services contribute together to the effectiveness of the armed forces by their commitment and ability to care for wounded service men in the event of armed conflict. Even as I speak, medical personnel from service hospitals in the United Kingdom and Germany are with our troops in the Gulf, ready to provide this service should the need arise.

I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House would wish to join me in paying tribute to the professionalism of the defence medical services and the high standard of training and skills that go to make up that professionalism. It is with great credit that this enables them to step directly into the role assigned to them in such situations as the current deployment to the Gulf. Service medical and dental officers, the nurses and their supporting personnel both military and civilian fulfil an important role in the armed forces.

I must emphasise that the primary role of the defence medical services is to treat the casualties of war, and where possible to return them fully fit to the front line. In this respect the defence medical services can be regarded as force multipliers. The main purpose of service hospitals in peacetime is to train the medical staff for their military medical role and to provide prompt treatment of service personnel by medical staff who are aware of the levels of fitness required and rigours of the tasks of their respective services. A distinction can be drawn between the hospital, as a building, and its staff, most of whom would in war practise their skills on the battlefield. Those factors must therefore be our main concern in any consideration of the numbers and location of the service hospitals that we require in the United Kingdom.

[Mr. Archie Hamilton]

While the medical services are directly responsible for providing primary and secondary care for service personnel, they also provide treatment for NHS patients, where a service hospital is available and within the spare capacity not taken up by its primary functions. In general, this treatment is provided free of charge, although provision exists, as in the case of the Princess of Wales RAF hospital, for some services to be purchased by district health authorities at less than full cost.

The advantage to the defence medical services is that the additional number and variety of patients which these arrangements enable them to treat help them to maintain the highest professional standards. In return, NHS hospitals provide treatment for service personnel. This arrangement thus benefits both the health authority and the defence medical services.

The initial stimulus for the recent review of service hospitals which was undertaken by the previous surgeon general, was provided by the National Audit Office, whose report on this subject was considered by the Committee of Public Accounts in the 1987-88 Session of this Parliament. The Committee's report stated that United Kingdom service hospitals should be fully utilised in the interests of NHS patients and the taxpayer and urged the Ministry of Defence to consider

"whether there need to be as many as eight separate Service hospitals and also to consider with the DHSS the practicability of a military wing in an NHS hospital."

At the same time, the continuing pressures on the defence budget reinforced the need for the Ministry of Defence to scrutinise very carefully its future requirement for service hospitals. Accordingly, the Surgeon General put in hand a review of the numbers, size, function and location of the hospitals required by the services in the United Kingdom, taking account of the war roles of the defence medical services, including the training requirements of that role.

The review was carried out in two main phases. The first report established that, if one service hospital was closed, the displaced military medical staff, who would still be required to meet the war role, could be absorbed into the remainder. It did not, however, recommend which hospital should be closed.

The second phase of the review involved the complex task of determining which closure would result in the least detriment to the ability of the defence medical services to meet their war role and achieve the savings to the defence budget for which we were looking, even before the changes in defence policy and priorities announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 25 July. I should say at this stage that, during the course of the studies for the review, the Department of Health and district health authorities which have service hospitals within their boundaries were consulted. Not unexpectedly, none welcomed the closure of a service hospital. Nevertheless, a choice has had to be made.

I am now sorry to have to confirm to my hon. Friends that it has been decided to close the Princess of Wales RAF hospital, Ely, by 31 March 1993.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): The Minister has made a grave statement. Has he considered the consequences of his decision on the famous Addenbrookes hospital, which is in my constituency and which is under considerable pressure? Will he discuss the matter with his colleagues in the Department of Health?

Mr. Hamilton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. We are carrying out extensive consultations with local health authorities, and we are well aware that, if this closure were to go ahead and nothing else were to happen, it would put a considerable extra burden on the hospital in his constituency.

I know that this will be a considerable disappointment to my hon. Friends and other hon. Members with a constituency interest, to the regional and district health authorities concerned and to the local community. All of them may dispute the decision, but on balance I believe it to be justified.

Although the decision to close the Ely hospital has been made following work done before "Options for Change" began, it was taken with the principles which underly that work very much in mind. It is only right that I should also inform the House that we are looking again at the requirement for service hospitals in the United Kingdom and Germany in the light both of future changes in the roles and deployment of the armed forces and of the reductions in their size which were announced by my right hon. Friend. I cannot, therefore, rule out the possibility of announcing further closures as our plans develop.

Last year, the Princess of Wales RAF hospital, Ely, treated 5,652 in-patients, 13,538 out-patients and 506 day patients who were NHS patients. That represented over 70 per cent. of all the patients treated there, and about 2 per cent. of all the NHS patients treated in the region. Bed occupancy rates are a widely used activity indicator in the NHS and in service hospitals. The Princess of Wales RAF hospital, Ely's bed occupancy is about 60 per cent. compared with about 80 per cent. in the NHS in England. Direct comparisons with the NHS are difficult, because of differing case mixes, but the Public Accounts Committee considered that service hospitals should aim for 70 per cent. occupancy.

I assure hon. Members and others with an interest in Ely hospital that, while this decision must stand, the Ministry of Defence will do everything possible to minimise the problems associated with the transfer of reponsibility for patients to NHS authorities. Preliminary soundings have already been taken from East Anglia regional health authority. Now that the decision has been announced, the service authorities will lose no time in discussing further with the regional and district health authorities involved the timetable for the rundown and closure of the Princess of Wales RAF hospital.

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend will understand that the people of Ely will be devastated when they hear this news in the morning. It is a great tragedy that this decision should have been made; had I realised that it would be, I might not have asked for the debate. My hon. Friend referred to a number of statistics, all of which clearly identify the importance of that hospital to the people of Ely for their NHS care. He has just referred to the running down and closure of that hospital and the transfer of patients, which is worrying because it does not imply anything about the future of the facilities. Can he give me any assurance that the RAF will talk to the regional and

district health authorities about the future of the facilities —the physical building, which is a modern, purpose-built hospital?

Mr. Hamilton: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and am just coming to that point in my remarks. I can give him that undertaking. As he mentioned, we are under an obligation to get the maximum proceeds from the site, but we are open to any offer that the health authority might make, as I am about to say.

The service authorities will also be considering and, where appropriate, discussing with the responsible regional and district health authorities how best to provide secondary care for service personnel in East Anglia after the hospital closes. In this context, we shall be ready to consider, without prejudice, any proposals which those health authorities may wish to make on the possibilities for increased co-operation.

We expect that this closure will save approximately £40 million over the 10 years of the Department's long-term costing. We have not yet decided on the specific disposal strategy for the site and will need to discuss the various options in detail with the relevant authorities. However, I should make it quite clear that our normal policy is to maximise revenue by disposing of property on the open market and with the benefit of an agreed planning brief. We must do so, in view of financial accountability to this House and the taxpayer. Our intention would therefore be to dispose of the site at full market value as soon as any planning issues have been resolved with the relevant authorities.

By its very nature, any hospital quickly assumes a place in the affections of the local community, and we would expect the closure of any one to be a cause for sadness to that community. Obviously, I am deeply conscious, too, of the feelings of those who are currently employed at the hospital, not least the civilian staff, who will be most concerned about their jobs. I regret that one side-effect of making an announcement of closure at this late hour in the evening is that personnel cannot be informed of the decision before tomorrow morning, and there is the possibility that they may hear it first through the media.

The Motion having been made after Ten o'clock and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at thirteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 14 November 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CLYDE PORT AUTHORITY BILL

LONDON UNDERGROUND (VICTORIA) BILL

TEES AND HARTLEPOOL PORT AUTHORITY BILL

SHARD BRIDGE BILL

Motion made,

That so much of the Lords Message [12th November] as relates to the Clyde Port Authority Bill, the London Underground (Victoria) Bill, the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill and the Shard Bridge Bill be now considered;

That the Promoters of the Clyde Port Authority Bill, the London Underground (Victoria) Bill, the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority Bill and the Shard Bridge Bill may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bills in the present Session; and the Petitions for the Bills shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the Bills shall be presented to the House not later than the seventh day after this day.

That there shall be deposited with each Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the last Session;

That each Bill shall be laid upon the Table of the House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid, shall be read the first, second and third time and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered tomorrow.

KING'S CROSS RAILWAYS BILL

Motion made,

That the Promoters of the King's Cross Railways Bill may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That the Bill shall be presented to the House not later than the seventh day after this day;

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the last Session;

That there shall be deposited with the Bill a declaration signed by the Agents for the Bill, stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill at the last stage of its proceedings in this House in the last Session;

That the Bill shall be laid upon the Table of the House by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office on the next meeting of the House after the day on which the Bill has been presented and, when so laid, shall be read the first and second time and committed (and shall be recorded in the Journal of this House as having been so read and committed);

That all Petitions relating to the Bill presented in the Session 1988-89 which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill, together with any minutes of evidence taken before the Committee on the Bill, shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session;

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within Session 1988-89 or deposited pursuant to paragraph *(b)* of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

That in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words 'under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)' were omitted;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session;—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered tomorrow.

SOUTHAMPTON RAPID TRANSIT BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made,

That the Promoters of the Southampton Rapid Transit Bill *[Lords]* may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session:

That as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be deemed to have been read the first time and shall be ordered to be read a second time;

That the Petitions against the Bill presented in the last Session which stand referred to the Committee on the Bill shall stand referred to the Committee on the Bill in the present Session;

That no Petitioners shall be heard before the Committee on the Bill, unless their Petition has been presented within the time limited within the last Session or deposited pursuant to paragraph *(b)* of Standing Order 126 relating to Private Business;

That, in relation to the Bill, Standing Order 127 relating to Private Business shall have effect as if the words 'under Standing Order 126 (Reference to committee of petitions against Bill)' were omitted;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered tomorrow.

KILLINGHOLME GENERATING STATIONS (ANCILLARY POWERS) BILL *[Lords]*

Motion made,

That the Promoters of the Killingholme Generating Stations (Ancillary Powers) Bill [*Lords*] may, notwithstanding anything in the Standing Orders or practice of this House, proceed with the Bill in the present Session; and the Petition for the Bill shall be deemed to have been deposited and all Standing Orders applicable thereto shall be deemed to have been complied with;

That if the Bill is brought from the Lords in the present Session, the Agents for the Bill shall deposit in the Private Bill Office a declaration signed by them stating that the Bill is the same, in every respect, as the Bill which was brought from the Lords in the last Session;

That as soon as a certificate by one of the Clerks in the Private Bill Office, that such a declaration has been so deposited, has been laid upon the Table of the House, the Bill shall be deemed to have been read the first time and shall be ordered to be read a second time;

That, since no Petitions remain against the Bill, no Petitioners shall be heard before any committee on the Bill save those who complain of any amendment as proposed in the filled up Bill or of any matter which arises during the progress of the Bill before the committee;

That no further Fees shall be charged in respect of any proceedings on the Bill in respect of which Fees have already been incurred during the last Session.—*[The Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

To be considered tomorrow.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT

Local Authorities (Spending)

1. **Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what level of inflation he assumed in fixing his total standard spending for local authorities for 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

The Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Chris Patten): Our proposals for the local authority finance settlement take account of what the country as a whole can afford. They do not assume any particular level of inflation. Our proposal for total standard spending is the level needed in cash terms in 1991-92 to provide the standard level of service taking into account all relevant factors.

Mr. Sheerman: Is the Secretary of State aware that most of us know that the level at which the assessment has been pitched is 7·8 per cent? With the current rate of inflation at about 10·9 per cent., even my poor school mathematics suggests that there will be a 3·7 per cent. gap between the assessment and what local authorities will be forced realistically to plan for in their budgets. Is the Secretary of State aware that good local authorities, such as mine, Kirklees in West Yorkshire, will be forced to make drastic cuts in expenditure on essential services, to lay off staff and to push up the poll tax to a rate at which they will be capped? Does he realise what he is doing to good local authorities with his plans?

Mr. Patten: As I recall, the standard standing assessment of the hon. Gentleman's constituency will increase by 18·4 per cent. next year. The level of local authority spending this year represents a 25 per cent. increase in two years. We are proposing an increase of nearly 13 per cent. in the external financing going into local authorities for next year. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that we should give more taxpayers' money to local government, I should be interested to hear how much more, who will pay for it and whether the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer has accepted his figure.

Mr. Thurnham: When my right hon. Friend talks to local authorities, will he remind them of the enormous savings that they can make by cutting waste and inefficiency? The Audit Commission has identified savings of £1·3 billion, of which only half have been achieved, with no help from the Labour party.

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend is entirely correct. Recently, the Audit Commission suggested that there was scope for savings of about £100 million in energy efficiency. In a study of sickness absence in some London local authorities it pointed out that the six worst could save £27 a year per community charge by reducing sickness absence to Confederation of British Industry average levels. There are substantial savings for local authorities if they listen to the Audit Commission and implement its proposals.

Mr. Gould: Nevertheless, is not it ridiculous for the same Secretary of State in the same Department on the

same subject, that is, local government finance, to use two widely differing inflation rates—an artificially low rate for local government spending commitments and the full, true rate of 10·9 per cent. for setting the business rate? Is not it one of the nonsenses that we understand the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) will sweep away? Will the Secretary of State support him in that or would he rather resign than do so? Or, will he be back here next week under new leadership to say that the poll tax was, after all, a terrible mistake?

Mr. Patten: I am delighted to discover that, despite a recent outbreak of democracy in the Labour party, the hon. Gentleman is still in his present slot—I think more or less. Let me say something about the comparisons that he made. Thanks to the uniform business rate, businesses will not be clobbered by high-spending Labour authorities, as they used to be. Over the past decade, businesses have regularly been fleeced by Labour local authorities, which is why their rates bills have gone up by more than the rate of inflation year after year. The hon. Gentleman is still remarkably coy about telling the House by how much he thinks the external financing of local authorities should have been increased next year and he should tell us where that money would come from.

River Thames

2. **Dr. Goodson-Wickes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what consultations he has had with the chairman of the National Rivers Authority about the condition of the River Thames and its tributaries in London.

The Minister for the Environment and Countryside (Mr. David Trippier): It is for the National Rivers Authority to decide how best to use its statutory powers in order to secure acceptable river quality standards.

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: I congratulate the Government on setting up the NRA and thereby tackling problems long neglected. I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the sorry state of the River Wandle, which flows through my constituency. That river will not be familiar to many hon. Members, but it is a tributary of the Thames once described as the busiest industrial river in the country. Will my hon. Friend give material encouragement to those of us who are striving locally to upgrade and improve the river?

Mr. Trippier: I compliment my hon. Friend on taking the personal initiative of bringing together the local authority, voluntary groups and the NRA in a group that I feel should be affectionately known as the "Wandles of Wimbledon". I am extremely keen to encourage the NRA to help my hon. Friend in whatever way it can. I recommend that he makes contact with the regional manager of the NRA. Whatever help it renders will be made easier as a result of the substantial increase in funding that we announced last week.

Mr. Tony Banks: Will the Minister pay tribute to the London county council and the Greater London council for all the work that they did to ensure that the Thames is probably the cleanest urban river in Europe? The efforts by people in Newham to clean up the River Lea were spoilt by the dumping of a large amount of industrial oil into the river. How many prosecutions have been taken out in the past 12 months against the irresponsible people who still pollute our rivers in London?

Mr. Trippier: I cannot give the specific number that the hon. Member seeks now, but I shall write to him on that matter. He will know that the NRA, which the Government were responsible for setting up, took action only the day after it was formed against the Shell oil company for polluting the River Mersey with oil from a fractured oil pipe and the company was subsequently fined £1 million. That made everybody sit up. There have been several similar examples throughout the year and they will continue.

I am most reluctant to single out the GLC for praise, but several initiatives have been taken, not least by the water companies and the NRA, which have played a significant part in cleaning up the Thames.

Mr. Jessel: Is my hon. Friend aware that thousands of my constituents who care deeply about the environment of the historic and beautiful stretch of the River Thames at Twickenham will be most grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment for calling in a planning application to construct a large food shop beside the Thames, a plan that the autocratic Richmond upon Thames council had intended to push through against the wishes of a large majority of my constituents?

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend is happy to accept my hon. Friend's congratulations and is most grateful.

Community Charge and Housing Benefits

3. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how the increase in rates support grant for 1991-92 will be identified to cover the cuts in the direct subsidy payable to local authorities to cover community charge and housing benefits; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister for Local Government and Inner Cities (Mr. Michael Portillo): The estimated cost of the change to local authorities in England is £68 million. The Government propose to increase the moneys that they provide by about £3 billion, or nearly 13 per cent. The change is more than adequately provided for.

Mr. Illsley: Is the Minister aware that in Barnsley the amount of direct subsidy has been reduced by about 3 per cent? Is he further aware that at the same time its revenue support grant has decreased from £28 million to £25 million, at a time when the authority has to deal with the effects of the Environmental Protection Act and other legislation that comes on stream next year as well as with pay rises, some of which have already been agreed, of 9 per cent? How can the Minister identify in that settlement where Barnsley has received adequate resources to fund community charge benefit? How does he expect the authority to set a poll tax in the face of all the reductions in grant?

Mr. Portillo: The hon. Gentleman makes partial use of his statistics and I shall give him some others. The standard spending assessment for Barnsley—that is the amount that we consider it appropriate for Barnsley to spend—has been increased by 19 per cent. The total amount of external finance from the Government has been

increased by 8 per cent. I explained to the hon. Gentleman in my main answer that an extra £3 billion will be provided to local authorities next year and that that is nearly 13 per cent. extra. It is clear that the rate of inflation between April next year and the following April will be in single figures. All the matters that the hon. Gentleman mentioned have been well and truly catered for.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will not my hon. Friend be a little more honest with the House?

Hon. Members: Oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Winterton: I said, "a little more honest", Mr. Speaker, over my hon. Friend's use of the term "external finance". Is not my hon. Friend confusing the uniform business rate contribution with what in the past have been moneys given under rate support grant, and basically supporting the view of the hon. Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley)? Is not it true that many areas have suffered a substantial reduction of the sum that they received from central Government under the RSG and that that is being masked by the increase in the business rate contribution, which, instead of coming from local government to local government, is coming from central Government?

Mr. Portillo: I should have thought that the important feature is the total moneys that local authorities will receive from central Government sources, which now include the national non-domestic rate. In Macclesfield, the increase is 19 per cent. That is because the people of Macclesfield will not be expected to put £50 each into the safety net next year. That gives Macclesfield a magnificent opportunity to set a low community charge next year.

Mr. Soley: Did the Minister discuss with his hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning the housing benefit implications of that policy? Given the announcement made by his hon. Friend only the other week, it will have a catastrophic effect on the leaseback scheme of private houses to both housing associations and local authorities. Does not the Minister realise that many more families will be pushed into bed-and-breakfast accommodation and that the bill for that will be passed on to the poll tax payer? We have the absurdity of the Government ending a scheme that they wanted to encourage while at the same time increasing housing benefit and poll tax bills. Is not it time that the Department began to talk to individual Ministers within it and came out with a coherent policy instead of a contradictory one?

Mr. Portillo: I see nothing catastrophic or harmful to local authorities, local authority tenants or community charge benefit claimants in what we propose. The amount of direct subsidy is being reduced from 97 to 95 per cent., and the balance is being made good within the SSAs, which have risen by an enormous amount, as even the Opposition must admit.

Mr. John D. Taylor: Will the Minister take the opportunity of clarifying the confusion in my constituency about the community charge?

Mr. Tony Banks: Poll tax.

Mr. Taylor: The poll tax. The Conservative party in Northern Ireland has said that the poll tax is good for us in Northern Ireland and that it wants to extend it to Northern Ireland. On the other hand the aspirant leader of the Conservative party said today that he wanted to abolish it in Great Britain. What is the future of the poll tax?

Mr. Portillo: The Government's policy is that the community charge applies in Great Britain but not in Northern Ireland.

Community Charge

4. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress in collecting the community charge in Coventry.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Key): At the end of September, 82 per cent. of charge payers in Coventry had begun paying. No doubt that figure will move towards 100 per cent. during the next five months.

Mr. Nicholson: May I, on behalf of, I hope, the whole House, congratulate my hon. Friend on his welcome appearance at the Dispatch Box?

Whatever legitimate arguments there may be among some of us about the financial arrangements for the new system this year, we are all agreed that taxation should be collected and that it should be paid. Does not my hon. Friend agree that Coventry has done rather well, despite the opposition of some Coventry Members? Of course, it has not done quite as well as Taunton Deane in my constituency.

Is my hon. Friend aware that the majority of law-abiding people deeply resent the prospect of having to pay more next year because of those who default? Should not the capping mechanism take that into account?

Mr. Key: Of course, it is true that both Taunton Deane and Salisbury have done rather better than Coventry. Some 94 per cent. of people have started paying and some 50 per cent. of the projected yield has been collected. It is also true that the poorest will suffer if people such as Members of Parliament do not pay their community charge.

I pay tribute to the great city of Coventry, especially on a very special day for that city, for achieving payment of its community charge very close to the national average.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Nellist—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Order.

Mr. Nellist: I join the Minister in marking the fact that, 50 years ago tonight, some 600 people died in Coventry and several thousand houses were either damaged or destroyed. Of all the remarks made about Coventry that the Tories could have made today, of all days, the remarks about defaulters by the hon. Member for Taunton (Mr. Nicholson) were the last that we expected.

Is the Minister really so confident that Coventry is the only city where, since 11 July, defaulters have appeared in large numbers in the magistrates courts—100 people a day in July, 200 a day in August, 500 a day in September and 1,000 a day in October and November? They were dragged before the courts because the Tory poll tax in Coventry and everywhere else is the most unpopular tax in the

country. Is the Minister also confident that in two weeks' time his new leader will have him at the Dispatch Box defending the poll tax?

Mr. Key: My city of Plymouth suffered similarly during the last war, so I do not need any lessons from the hon. Gentleman. Coventry began issuing statutory reminders in June and held its first magistrates court hearing in July. It has not encountered any problems with court hearings. After an initially slow start, it increased the number of summonses to 1,000 a week. That figure has now reduced to 500 a week because Coventry has obtained most of the liability orders that it needs.

Mr. Brandon-Bravo: Does not the impact of non-payers, especially those who can and should pay but simply will not, concern people not only in Coventry but throughout Britain? This year, sensible limits have been imposed on what local authorities can spend. Will my hon. Friend assure the House that next year, it will not be possible for local authorities simply to add on a large sum to make up for those who will not pay?

Mr. Key: It is interesting that under the previous discredited rating system, some 30 per cent. of people needed reminders. It remains true today that those who do not pay increase the burden of local taxation on those who do.

Mr. Blunkett: I, too, congratulate the Minister on his appointment. I feel almost diffident about asking my question as it will put his new job on the line. Will he ask the Secretary of State whether he thinks that the people of Coventry agree with the new Secretary of State for Education and Science, who on the radio earlier today suggested that we did not need a leadership election to understand that the Conservative party has a problem with the poll tax? He went on to say that it was a problem that the Conservative party needed properly to address before the general election. Does the Minister agree that the issue needs addressing properly, and if so, how will he do that?

Mr. Key: The problem has been addressed for the past 20 years. I gather that my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) is promising jam tomorrow in much the same way as the Labour party has. It has done nothing but promise jam tomorrow. It is about time that we heard a little more about its plans. It is important to remember that about £3 billion extra external financing has been made available this year, as I am sure the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Hughes) will recognise.

Mr. John Hughes *rose——*

Mr. Speaker: Order. If the hon. Gentleman looks down the Order Paper he will see that, with luck, I shall be able to call him later.

Temperature

5. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what predictions his Department is making concerning the rise in average temperature over the next 10 years.

Mr. Chris Patten: The intergovernmental panel on climate change estimates that, as a result of human activities, average global temperatures will increase by 0·2 deg Celsius during the next 10 years. The uncertainty range of that estimate, which does not take account of any natural climate variability, is 0·15 deg and 0·3 deg Celsius.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Secretary of State agree that, as far as measurement is possible, that is the highest increase in the past 10,000 years? *[Interruption.]* This is a serious matter and I hope that the Secretary of State and other Conservative Members will treat it seriously.

Is the Minister aware that that is the highest increase in the past 10,000 years measured from air samples in the Antarctic and that in order merely to contain current levels of concentration we would require a 60 per cent. drop in emissions of greenhouse gases, primarily carbon dioxide? In those circumstances, does the Secretary of State agree that it is necessary to take much stronger and more urgent action to cut the emissions of greenhouse gases and to promote afforestation schemes and the protection of the southern ocean and the savannah grasslands, which are the major areas where the change from carbon dioxide to oxygen takes place?

Mr. Patten: As the hon. Gentleman will doubtless know, there was an extremely successful conference last week in Geneva at which we reached an outline agreement on climate change and global warming, which should lead to the start of negotiations on a climate change convention next February. The science is not quite as the hon. Gentleman described it, but one of the encouraging features of last week's conference was not only the commitment to action by all states, but the fact that, I think for the first time, nobody disagreed fundamentally with the scientific conclusions that were advanced.

Mr. Squire: Does my right hon. Friend recall that recently on this important subject the Labour party committed itself to phasing out nuclear power and to a greater use of coal as against gas, at the same time bringing forward a still earlier timetable for stabilising carbon dioxide? Will my right hon. Friend confirm that those do not add up and that that is simply a sign of scientific ignorance among Labour Members?

Mr. Patten: They certainly do not add up. The Labour party is the only organisation outside the executive committee of the National Union of Mineworkers that thinks that coal is cleaner than gas. It has also said that we can secure the environmental objectives and the goals that we want at virtually no cost. That is frankly dishonest and I hope that the Labour party will face up to some of those problems rather more honestly.

Mrs. Ann Taylor: In view of what the Secretary of State has just said, will he confirm that he wanted to accept the European target on the stabilisation of carbon dioxide emissions by 2000 and that it was the Prime Minister who intervened to insist that the target date should be 2005? Perhaps while the Secretary of State is answering that question, he will also tell the House whether he agrees with the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) that the Government could do better in their action on global warming and that Britain should play a more positive role in the development of EC environmental policy.

Mr. Patten: I know of no one at the Geneva conference last week who did not think that we played an extremely prominent and helpful role in securing agreement. If the

hon. Lady had spoken to some of the European Free Trade Association, European Community, and other Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development members, she would have found that that was the case. As to agreement within the Community, despite the astonishing intervention of hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould), the shadow spokesman on the environment, in writing to every other European environment Minister, very few of whom had heard of him, to urge them to try to isolate us at that meeting, we secured a wholly satisfactory outcome which recognised the different problems and programmes of a number of European countries. The agreement enabled Britain and EFTA to give a strong lead at the Geneva conference, which ensured that it was as successful as I hope that the hon. Member for Dagenham would wish.

Mr. Patrick Thompson: Bearing in mind the Government's positive lead, will my right hon. Friend pay tribute to the climatic research unit at East Anglia university, which has done excellent work on global warming? Does he agree that a sober and scientific appraisal of the facts is needed, rather than party political posturing?

Mr. Patten: The unit to which my hon. Friend draws attention has done outstanding work. That is recognised not only in Europe but beyond. I am delighted that, as a result of the public expenditure settlement announced last week in the autumn statement, we are substantially increasing the funding of environmental research on climate change and other matters.

Mr. Simon Hughes: Is the Secretary of State not aware of the despair felt by many environmentalists because the Government are content merely to stabilise emissions over the next 15 years while other members of the European Community—such as Germany—are clear that they can reduce emissions by 15 or 20 per cent. by 2005? If Germany can do that, why cannot we do so? Is not that another example of short-term national political considerations being placed at the forefront of international environmental considerations? Where is the principle?

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman may not know that, according to returns made to the International Energy Agency, six European countries have not declared any stabilisation or reduction targets for carbon dioxide. Different countries have different sets of problems and some of those with a high input from nuclear energy find certain issues rather easier to resolve than we do. The hon. Gentleman should also be aware that the Germans are talking about an orientation, rather than the pledged target that we have set.

Nuclear Waste

7. **Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the Government's latest prediction of the levels of nuclear waste to be disposed of in the United Kingdom in the years 1990-95.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory): About 125,000 cu m of low level radioactive waste will be disposed of to Drigg during the next five years.

Mr. Jones: Is the Minister aware that the Chernobyl incident released about 50 million curies of radioactivity, and that we already have 5,000 million curies of high-level radioactive waste stored at Sellafield? Is not it foolhardy to continue importing such waste from other countries in even greater amounts over the next five years when we do not know how to dispose of that which we already have?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: We do not import radioactive waste. We import spent nuclear fuel for reprocessing and since 1976 all contracts provide for the eventual return of the waste arising to the countries concerned.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that reducing our nuclear energy production and burning more coal would create more waste products such as carbon dioxide, which causes global warming, and that far more radiation comes from spent ash than from the sort of manageable waste produced by the nuclear power industry?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: That is a fair point. Every industry and every form of power generation should take responsibility for its emissions.

Coastal Waters (Discharges)

8. **Mr. Kennedy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to revise the criteria by which to gauge the appropriate standards required for discharges to coastal waters; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Trippier: On 5 March, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that in future all significant discharges of sewage to coastal waters would receive at least primary treatment. It is now for the relevant regulatory bodies to apply this policy to individual discharges.

Mr. Kennedy: Further to that announcement, the Minister may be aware that there has been a controversial proposal for a main drainage treatment works at Inverness. Following the environmental assessment, the original proposals have been shelved, as they would clearly have been in breach of the guidelines, and the costs involved to bring a treatment works up to a suitable standard will probably be more than twice those originally envisaged—well in excess of £10 million. Will the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State therefore lend a sympathetic ear to local authorities such as Highland region, which will have to incur such huge costs for future generations, and will he encourage the Scottish Office to do likewise?

Mr. Trippier: Experience has taught me that planning applications for sewage treatment works are invariably controversial, as are those for landfill or incineration sites. I shall, of course, bring the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland.

Mr. Paice: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the principal causes of pollution in coastal waters are rivers into which waste is discharged? Will he ensure that there are adequate controls not just in this country but throughout Europe and that they are especially applied to countries that border the Rhine, which contributes more to pollution in the North sea than any river in this country?

Mr. Trippier: In so far as my hon. Friend's question referred to the United Kingdom, I accept entirely that he is right. As a result of measures introduced in the Water Act 1989, regulations are tougher than they have ever been. Secondly, the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will ensure a far tougher regime, especially part I of the Act which will tighten standards for those who pollute air, land or water. That will be effective. It may also please my hon. Friend to know that several proposals that will emanate from Europe will be based on our experience and the legislation in the Environmental Protection Act. Not only is our example replicated throughout Europe, but the same standards will apply in what might be described as a level playing field.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the Minister confirm that the level of nuclear discharges from Sellafield today is one hundredth of what it was in the 1970s?

Mr. Trippier: I am not in a position to confirm or to deny that figure, but so that we do not fall into the trap of scaremongering—I know that it would never cross the hon. Gentleman's mind to indulge in that—I can tell the hon. Gentleman that any accident which may occur, or any releases into the atmosphere from Sellafield, are minuscule compared with the nuclear releases from natural sources such as rocks. We ought to get this whole thing in proportion.

Community Charge

9. **Mr. Irvine:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to introduce a standard disaggregation formula which will identify separately the amounts being raised by county and district councils as regards the community charge.

Mr. Portillo: The proposed community charge bill for 1991-92 will be simpler and easier to understand. It will show more clearly than this year which are the overspending councils and which are the prudent ones.

Mr. Irvine: Is my hon. Friend aware that in Ipswich the Labour-controlled borough council and the Conservative-controlled county council are unable to agree for what share of the community charge they are respectively responsible? Does he appreciate that without a standard disaggregation formula there will continue to be such disputes and it will be that much more difficult to establish more accountability?

Mr. Portillo: The Bill that we propose to introduce next year will, I hope, meet my hon. Friend's concern. Had that Bill been enacted this year, it would have shown clearly that Suffolk council was responsible for 77 per cent. of the total spending by the authorities in my hon. Friend's area and that Ipswich borough council was responsible for an overspend of £97 on its standard spending assessment. That is nearly 100 per cent. more than it should be. If overspending of that kind continues next year—I hope that it will not—it will appear on next year's bills.

Mr. John Hughes: It is appropriate that the Minister referred earlier to the Coventry war experience. I draw attention to another aspect of the 1939-45 war. I wonder whether the Minister has read about the Nuremberg trails. If he has, he will have learnt that war criminals said that they tortured people to obey the law and that they murdered people to obey the law. Does the Minister agree that they were not obligated to obey an immoral law and that similarly no hon. Member is obligated to obey an immoral law and thus absolve himself or herself from responsibility to constituents suffering untold hardship as a result of the imposition of the poll tax?

Mr. Portillo: I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman's question has to do with the disaggregation formula. However, like other hon. Members, the hon. Gentleman is paid a salary by the taxpayers of this country in order to make laws. He is not paid a salary by the taxpayers of this country in order to break laws, or to urge others to break them.

Mr. Cormack: Do the very refreshing and enlightened remarks by the Secretary of State for Education and Science this morning suggest a new and realistic approach to the poll tax?

Mr. Portillo: My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, South (Mr. Cormack) was one of those who were kind enough during the summer of this year to contribute to the Government's review of the community charge. That review is now complete. I thank my hon. Friend again for the very important contribution that he made to it.

Mr. O'Brien: Has not the hon. Member for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine) highlighted yet again the problems and disadvantages of the poll tax? Is not it time for the Minister and his ministerial colleagues to line up behind the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) and say, "Let's scrap it altogether?" When will they learn the lesson?

Mr. Portillo: First, my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) has said no such thing. Secondly, my hon. Friend the Member for Ipswich (Mr. Irvine) raised a serious point and got a serious answer. So far as I could judge from my hon. Friend's expression, he was satisfied with the changes made by the Government in the Bill as they were precisely the kind of things that he was looking for.

Bathing Waters

10. **Mr. Andrew Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide the most recent figures which are available on the compliance of bathing beaches with the European Community bathing water standards.

11. **Sir Anthony Meyer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what percentage of designated United Kingdom bathing waters currently complies with the European Community bathing waters directive; and what was the comparable position in 1979.

19. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide the latest figures which are available on the compliance of bathing beaches with the European Community bathing water standards.

Mr. Trippier: The 1990 results show that 77 per cent. of the 446 identified bathing waters in the United Kingdom met the directive's coliform bacteria standards this year. This compares with 76 per cent. of 440 waters in 1989 and 66 per cent. of 27 waters in 1979.

Mr. Welsh: In view of the long time scale involved, what guarantees can the Minister give that measures to bring beaches up to current EC standards will be sufficient to cope with the improvement in those standards, as they will not be static? What consultations has the Minister had with local authorities and what additional resources is he giving to improve beaches? Furthermore, what steps is he taking to lower the discharge levels of nitrates and phosphates into the marine environment?

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I announced previously the United Kingdom's national target would be 100 per cent. compliance by the year 2000. I am pleased to say that that target has now changed and I am able to announce from the Dispatch Box that we believe that we shall achieve 100 per cent. compliance by 1997. I know that the hon. Gentleman will welcome that. It will involve a capital spend to ensure that the treatment of the waters is brought up to standard. Our record in the United Kingdom is extremely good. I would find it extremely difficult to believe that any other member state would have 100 per cent. compliance by 1997.

Sir Anthony Meyer: I was pleased to hear of the improvements announced by my hon. Friend the Minister. Can he say whether the improvements extend also to the beaches of north Wales because it does not look like it or smell like it? Is he aware that we in north Wales do not think much of the idea of long sea outfalls as a long-term way of curing the problem of pollution of our beaches?

Mr. Trippier: The target date that I gave earlier applies to all bathing waters designated in the United Kingdom. Therefore, it applies to Wales. I have further good news for my hon. Friend and the House. Later this afternoon my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be announcing details of an accelerated programme which will ensure that we meet our target by 1997. That will apply to Wales as well.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister has announced a 1997 deadline for bacterial standards on beaches. On what time scale will the Department consider discharges to rivers? Will there be serious consideration of the impact of the growth of algae in the North sea on the marine environment and fish life?

Mr. Trippier: It is the same target. The point raised earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-East (Mr. Paice) has an effect on coastal waters. We are talking about two directives—the bathing water directive and the municipal waste water directive, which is not yet in its final form but which we hope to agree in December. The target date for the municipal waste water directive I would guess—I think that it will be confirmed next month—will be the year 2000. As I have said, the date for 100 per cent. compliance with the bathing water directive is 1997.

Mr. Brazier: Does my hon. Friend agree that a crucial element in meeting both the standards is investment in sewage treatment? Does he agree that one of the effects of the privatisation of water and sewerage has been the liberalisation of such investment from the Treasury? Does he agree that that preserves us from the danger of a sudden swingeing cut in investment such as occurred under the previous Labour Government?

Mr. Trippier: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I would go further and say that it is only as a result of privatisation that we have a massive £28 billion investment programme which will be invested over the next 10 years by the newly privatised water companies. I have to assure my hon. Friend that neither I nor any Minister in any Government could find that sort of money from Her Majesty's Treasury. It is interesting to hear the carping from Labour Members with regard to the privatisation of water, as when they were last in office they cut the amount of assistance given to the water authorities.

Mr. Win Griffiths: Does the Minister recall that Britain's wholehearted adoption of the bathing water quality directive came about only after the European Commission threatened the Government with legal action in the European Court of Justice? That is on record. Further, does not the new accelerated programme to meet standards by 1997 result from the action that is currently pending in the European Court? As the Government have the legal responsibility for water standards, what contingency plans do they have to effect an even quicker implementation of the standards and at what cost to the water consumer?

Mr. Trippier: I am sorry to say that I have never heard so much rubbish in all my life. If we are talking about facts, let us look at the facts. When talking about compliance with the bathing water directive, the House should be reminded that when the previous Labour Government were in office between 1974 and 1979 they did nothing—absolutely nothing. They never designated one single bathing water. Not one beach was covered by them. It is a bit rich for the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) to try to lecture me or anyone on this side of the House about what this Government are doing. The accelerated programme is the finest in Europe. The trouble with Opposition Members is that they delight in pulling the nation down and selling it short. That was the view expressed by the hon. Member for Dagenham (Mr. Gould) in the letter that he sent to European Community Ministers. It is an absolute disgrace.

Cathedrals

12. **Mr. Gerald Bowden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any plans to meet the chairman of English Heritage to discuss his cathedrals initiative.

Mr. Chris Patten: Lord Montagu has told me that the provision of £11·5 million over the next three years for grants towards repair to cathedrals will enable us to establish the scheme on a really sound footing. My officials are discussing the basis of the new grant scheme with his officials and with the church authorities.

Mr. Bowden *rose*——

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for two Tory Members to be running a book?

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are dealing with an important issues of English heritage.

Mr. Bowden: I refer to cathedrals, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for acknowledging that the repair and maintenance of cathedrals is beyond the resources of cathedral authorities. As those great

institutions enjoy affection and respect far beyond merely churchgoers and are monuments to our national heritage, is not there a case for increased public support to ensure that they are maintained properly?

Mr. Patten: I agree with my hon. Friend. I am sure that it is right that public appeals and private donations will remain the major source of funds for the repair of cathedrals, but it is right also that the state should play a role by using grant to lever in private finance. That is the objective of our new scheme. As I said, we shall be spending £11·5 million on the scheme in the next three years. The scheme has been widely welcomed by churchmen and by others who visit our great church buildings, though I recognise that the repair of cathedrals is not uppermost in everybody's minds this afternoon.

Mr. Cryer: I endorse the view that public money should be spent on those great works of art and great assets for the country at large. Does the Secretary of State agree that, as he has undertaken to endorse the principle that public money should be spent on those great buildings, it would be better to do that and leave market forces to obtain money for Trident, for example? Instead of leaving cathedrals to raise money by flag days, we could use flag days for spending on nuclear weapons. The £9,000 million saved could then be spent on pensions, the national health service and a little bit on cathedrals.

Mr. Patten: The hon. Gentleman must have heard the Leader of the Opposition say on a number of occasions that the Labour party now believes in market forces. That is what we are told again and again. The hon. Gentleman must therefore be a continuing embarrassment to those responsible for trying to burnish the image of the Labour party.

Countryside Commission

13. **Mr. David Shaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much the Government have increased funding to the Countryside Commission since 1979; and how funding will be increased in the next three years.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Since 1979, grant in aid to the Countryside Commission has more than doubled in real terms to £25 million this year. The commission will lose its responsibilities in Wales from April 1991, but its grant for England is planned to rise to more than £30 million next year and £41 million over the following two years.

Mr. Shaw: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Countryside Commission has done particularly well from a financial viewpoint under the Government of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister? Does he further agree that the additional funds provided by the Government have enabled the Countryside Commission to plant more trees, which is particularly important to the people of Kent and my constituents who suffered considerably from the loss of trees as a result of the 1987 storms?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend is quite right. The chairman of the Countryside Commission has warmly welcomed the sharply increased funding that we plan for the years ahead. It will enable the Countryside Commission to undertake several new initiatives and to continue the Task Force Trees programme, which will help to replace trees lost in the storms earlier this year, including in Kent.

Mr. Denis Howell: Is the Minister aware that we join in welcoming the increased subvention for the Countryside Commission, but are still concerned about whether the money made available will enable us to make sufficient progress on access to the countryside and rights of way, an issue which was very properly identified in the White Paper but does not seem to be making much progress? We are also concerned about the continuing problems of common land. Will those two problems, which are of much concern to many people who use the countryside and who want access and rights of way, receive greater priority as a result of this and future settlements?

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman acknowledges that the Countryside Commission has done well under this Government. He mentioned the right of way network. I confirm that it is an announced aim of the Countryside Commission to bring into good order our entire network of rights of way—all 140,000 miles of it—by the end of the century. As regards common land, I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the statement that my hon. Friend the Minister made in recent weeks.

Mr. Bill Walker: My hon. Friend will be aware that the Scottish headquarters of the Countryside Commission is in my constituency, not far from his Scottish home. He will realise that under the Prime Minister and this Government the Countryside Commission has been responsible for vast improvements in access to many of Scotland's more beautiful parts, with the introduction of car parking and other facilities such as camping and caravanning. That has been the result of the generous attitude adopted by the Prime Minister and the Government.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I am delighted that Scotland is to get its own Nature Conservancy Council. I was sad, but not wholly surprised, that that was resisted every step of the way by the Labour party. Doubtless that attitude will have been noted in Scotland.

Council Homes

14. **Mr. Flannery:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many council homes have been started by local councils in the current year.

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. Michael Spicer): Local authority housebuilding is currently running at a rate of 7,000 starts a year. Housing associations are the major providers of new subsidised housing for rent. We announced last week that funding of housing associations will increase to more than £2 billion by 1993-94.

Mr. Flannery: Is not the stark reality that since the Government took office the building of council houses has dropped catastrophically, that homelessness is rising steadily, that the number of people on council waiting lists in big cities is growing all the time, whereas it was falling in 1979, and that many building workers are being laid off as the slump deepens?

Mr. Spicer: The stark reality is that about 40,000 households are in temporary accommodation. At the same

time, there are about 100,000 empty council houses, mainly in Labour-controlled authorities. That is the real scandal of the housing problem, which we intend to put right by attaching conditions to the vast housing subsidies that we give to councils.

Mr. Dickens: Is it right to condemn people to live in council houses for the rest of their lives, paying rent until the grave and having nothing to leave their children? Is not it preferable to pursue our present home ownership policy and to help housing associations?

Mr. Spicer: My hon. Friend is right. That is why our policy of right to buy has been such an enormous success, with more than a million households that would not otherwise have done so now owning their own houses. It is also why we shall be experimenting in Basildon with the rent-to-mortgage scheme.

Mr. George Howarth: Does the Minister recognise that there is a strong connection between the decline in the supply of all sorts of rented housing over the past 11 years and the inexorable rise in homelessness? Has he had an opportunity to read the report prepared recently by the Tory-controlled London Boroughs Association, entitled, "A Crying Shame—The Child Victims of Homelessness"? That report calls for a supplement to the inadequate £250 million allocation for homelessness and the relaxation of controls on capital receipts and it calls for local authorities to be allowed to bring into use long-term vacancies in the private sector. What does the hon. Gentleman intend to do about that?

Mr. Spicer: What I want to do about the 600,000 empty houses in the private sector is to reinvigorate the whole private sector by totally changing the attitude to landlords. My problem is that if the Labour party ever returned to power, it would introduce new controls which would completely kill off the rented sector. The number of houses per head of population has risen considerably in the past few years. Because of the break-up of marriages and various other social forces, there are pressures on housing. That is why we have vastly increased the money that we are spending on the homeless, both single people and families. This Government have done more than any other Government to focus money on the homeless.

Point of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of the ending of the cold war, the growing concern about the spread of nuclear weapons and nuclear technology to other nations, especially given the background of the Gulf crisis, and the impending meeting to stop or limit nuclear tests, should not the House have an opportunity to discuss the nuclear test that is likely to take place in the Nevada desert? Surely the House has the right to debate that issue. Will you use your good offices, Mr. Speaker, to bring that about?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order for me. The hon. Member might raise it tomorrow with the Leader of the House in business questions.

BALLOT FOR NOTICES OF MOTIONS FOR FRIDAY 30 NOVEMBER

Members successful in the ballot were:

Mr. Michael Neubert
Mr. Martyn Jones
Mr. Graham Bright

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS, &c.

Ordered,

That the draft Education Support Grants Regulations 1990 be referred to a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[FIFTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [7 November].

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign, We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Younger.]*.

Question again proposed.

The Economy

Mr. Speaker: I must announce to the House that I have selected two amendments—that in the name of the Leader of the Opposition and the amendment, for Division only, in the name of the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, about the selection of amendments. I wish to stress that I speak on behalf not only of the Scottish National party but of the nationalist parties and the party led by the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Molyneaux). As you know, we fully understand and appreciate the procedures which preclude you from selecting amendments today, other than those that you have specifically chosen. But you are aware also that this is a pluralist House and that it is necessary to debate all the different aspects and attitudes in the House. I therefore wonder whether it is possible for you to support the other minority parties in asking the Procedure Committee to look at the possibility of from time to time selecting amendments in the name of the members of those parties.

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, but only the Scottish National party has an amendment on the Order Paper today; the Ulster Unionist party and Plaid Cymru do not. The hon. Lady should take up herself with the Procedure Committee the question of giving authority to the Chair to call a third amendment for Division. Today I shall be as helpful as I can be in calling members of the minority parties to put their point of view in the debate.

I must also announce to the House that, in view of the large number of right hon. and hon. Members—mostly right hon. Members—who want to participate today, I shall put a 10-minute limit on speeches between 7 and 9 o'clock. But I ask those who are called before then to try to ensure that their speeches are not much longer than that.

3.35 pm

Mr. John Smith (Monklands, East): I beg to move, at the end of the Question, to add:

But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech seeks to continue economic policies which have caused recession, falling output and investment, rising unemployment, high interest rates and a massive deficit in the balance of payments; deplore the continuing confusion and disarray in domestic economic policies and towards the future economic and social development of the European Community; and call upon the

[Mr. John Smith]

Government to prepare for the competitive challenges of the Single Market after 1992 by adopting an industrial strategy which promotes sustained investment in the manufacturing sector and encourages industrial innovation through the application of science and technology, to exploit fully the potential of the neglected regions through a vigorous regional economic policy and a modern transport system, and to provide the new opportunities in education and training which are crucial to Britain's economic recovery and future prosperity.

When debating the Gracious Speech as we do in this House each year, we do not confine ourselves to a textual analysis of the often anodyne language contained in it. We look to other material, to additional evidence, to establish what Government policies are and are intended to be over the forthcoming Session. What Members find persuasive by way of additional evidence is very much a matter of individual choice, but for my part I turn for guidance to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in his capacity as chairman of the Conservative party. Each year he sets —dare I say it—the style, if not the substance, of the Conservative party conference, with the carefully calculated slogan that hangs over the conference during the whole of its proceedings.

In 1989 the slogan was:

"The right team for Britain's future".

The right hon. Gentleman buttressed the message by quoting Henry's exhortation to the troops at Agincourt:

"He which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him depart".

There was a consequence which Henry had not foreseen, which was that most of them did depart. There has been the biggest change in ministerial offices in the post-war political history of this country.

Looking back on it now, admittedly with the luxurious benefit of hindsight, we see that the right hon. Gentleman clearly had a talent for irony which we had not properly recognised heretofore. I doubt whether there has been a time in post-war politics when there have been so many ministerial changes. It would be repetitive to read out a long list of the senior ministerial changes, occasioned by the confusion and disarray within the Government, which have occurred since the right hon. Gentleman's stirring slogan was first revealed. But this does remind us how important it is to attach proper significance to the slogan that he gives us each year.

This year, the right hon. Gentleman tackled new ground. The slogan was: "The strength to succeed". Again with the benefit of hindsight, I believe that he should be credited with prescience as well as irony. How did he know that this very day a struggle for the succession would be announced? The very question that will agitate Conservative Members over the next weekend is: who will have the strength to succeed to the leadership of the Conservative party? How did the right hon. Gentleman know all this? How did he know that this matter would be of such concern to his party?

I have been giving consideration to whether we might offer the right hon. Gentleman a slogan for next year's Conservative party conference. Perhaps he should hold a competition among his hon. Friends to see who could come up with a slogan as prescient and ironic as its predecessors. One or two come to mind. "The challenge of leadership" might be one. Perhaps "Combating unforeseen circumstances" might have a certain charm in certain quarters; but the one that I feel most attracted to is "Catching the train to Europe". I offer the right hon. Gentleman the option of putting either a question mark or an exclamation mark after that slogan.

The trouble is that the confusion and disarray which has surfaced in the turmoil of ministerial changes has finally burst through into a direct challenge to the Prime Minister by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine)—and by who knows who else, in the weeks to come. There will be a fierce struggle in the Conservative party over style, substance, personalities and policies and it will be so serious that it will divide the Conservative party not just for the next week or so, but for a very long time ahead.

However, today we are considering the Government's economic policies, a subject which is the cause of almost as much distress as the Conservative party's internal division. We begin our consideration with the current state of the economy, which is in a recession. What is more, that recession results directly, as we have frequently argued, from the Government's errors in economic policy, some of which, I will argue later, bear a striking similarity to previous errors by previous Conservative Governments.

In the exchanges following the Chancellor's autumn statement, I was taken to task for insisting that the Government should admit the truth about our present economic situation and for pointing out the truth—that we are in a recession. I was glad to note that, a few days after that, in "The Money Programme" the following Sunday, the Chancellor appeared to accept—in a qualified way—that we are in a recession.

People who watch the Chancellor answering questions in this House and who saw him on "The Money Programme" will be aware that the right hon. Gentleman's tactic has been to query the definition of recession. He says that there are so many definitions of recession: how do we assess whether we are in one? He slips from one definition to another rather like a bird flying around a cage looking for a statistical perch to alight upon temporarily, or for some convenient resting place. The Chancellor says that some people say one thing while others say another.

The Chancellor was not always so coy. When he gave evidence to the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee on 4 December last year, my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms. Abbott) asked the Chancellor directly:

"What is your definition of a recession?"

The Chancellor replied:

"I think I would take as a definition of a recession the one that we have traditionally accepted and that is a reduction in gross domestic product over a measurable period of time, probably two or more quarters, although there is no formal and wholly agreed definition of recession. That is the sense in which I would use the term: a reduction in GDP over perhaps two quarters, a six-month period . . . If we have a reduction in GDP over a measurable period of time then I think it is reasonable to begin thinking in terms of a recession, but that is expressly not what we are forecasting at the moment."

We have a definition of a recession and a forecast that a recession would not happen.

An important table in the autumn statement, table 2/2-11, predicts the economic prospects for 1991. That table is entitled

"Gross domestic product and its components".

It states that, for the first half of 1990, for the GDP at factor cost, the average measure is 180·3. It drops in the second half of the year to 178·2. In the first half of 1991, it is 178·3 and it then rises rather mysteriously in the second half of 1991 by two full points. The consequence of

that is clear. The autumn statement forecasts, according to the Chancellor's predictions, a drop in the level of output not only for two quarters, but for four quarters in succession.

By the Chancellor's own definition and prediction, are we not in an extremely serious recession? We should have a lot less nonsense from the Chancellor, who queries and quibbles over whether we are in a recession. We know we are in one. All the companies and businesses in our constituencies are aware of that, and the Chancellor's statistics prove that we are in one. Why cannot the Government come clean about that?

We are also aware that we are in a recession as a result of other things that the Government are predicting. Only a few months ago, the Budget predicted that manufacturing output would increase by 0·75 per cent. in the first half of next year. The Chancellor now predicts that it will fall by 0·5 per cent. over the whole of next year. In the Budget, investment is forecast to decline by 0·75 per cent. in the first half of next year. However, the autumn statement predicts that it will fall by 1·75 per cent. in the whole of 1991. In the budget, exports were forecast to rise by 5·5 per cent., but that has been revised downwards to rise by 2·5 per cent. The figures for manufacturing production released yesterday confirm the downward trend and the pattern of negative growth.

The Government's record on prediction is just as bad as their record on economic management. However, prediction is important because the only message in the Conservative party's shop window—if we could get the Government to admit it—is that, while things may be bad now, it will not be long before they will get better because we shall see everything improve in the years ahead.

We remember the hype of the so-called economic miracle when the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, speaking from the Dispatch Box in the 1988 Budget debate, told us that we had overhauled what was then West Germany and were on track for catching up with Japan. It has been the persistent standard trick of the Conservative party grossly to exaggerate achievements and unrealistically to minimise the potential downturn when their policies run into it.

Let us consider the Government's forecasting on inflation—that "temporary blip" which occurred in 1988. We remember that same Chancellor telling us not to worry because it was just a monthly phenomenon, a blip which would soon blip away like one of the little dots that appear for a passing second on a television screen, a minor irritant, no more—just a passing detail. We know what happened. We have had inflation at distressing levels ever since.

We know that the forecast for 1988 turned out to be 62 per cent. wrong and that the forcast for 1989 turned out to be 30 per cent. wrong. We know that the autumn statements last year and this year are 100 per cent. wrong. Last year at the time of the autumn statement, the Chancellor of the Exchequer stood at the Dispatch Box and told us not to worry because inflation would be 5·75 per cent. now. What is it? Nudging 11 per cent. That is the Government's record on forecasting. People are asked to rely on those predictions and assurances that things will be better next year. We have been told exactly the same story in previous years.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer relies on the retail prices index coming down. I should hope it will come down next year. I hope that inflation will not be at these record levels next year. Indeed, the Government would have to do all the silly things that they have done in the past year all over again in order to maintain it at an RPI level of 11 per cent.

There was a time when the Chancellor found the RPI an awkward statistic. That was when, to quote the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), the Chancellor was using his "considerable talents" to explain away the Madrid conditions. He felt that there was a problem with the RPI. He had all sorts of other definitions of inflation. There was the rather ingenious "proximate rate" which made a fleeting appearance during what one might call the Madrid season, which appears to have come to an end. We also had the "underlying rate". As I understand it, there are two versions of the underlying rate. One involves stripping out the mortgage rate; the other is a bit bolder, and involves stripping out the mortgage rate and the poll tax, which gives an even better underlying rate. Obviously, the British people cannot strip out either when it comes to paying bills.

What criteria are we to apply next year to this year of recovery? The Chancellor was asked that very point by my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) during the exchanges on the autumn statement. My right hon. Friend asked:

"When the underlying rate was less than the RPI, the Government made a great deal of it. Now that it is likely to be more than the RPI"—

as has been predicted for next year—

"may we have his forecast of the underlying rate of inflation, excluding mortgage interest, at the end of next year, the fourth quarter?"

The bland reply from the Chancellor of the Exchequer was:

"As the right hon. Gentleman knows"—

here is sugar to the pill—

"—he is a very distinguished former Treasury Minister"—

that is undoubtedly true—

"—the underlying rate of inflation has never been published, for perfectly understandable reasons."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 127.]

Another of the Chancellor's endearing tricks is to invent new conventions and rules whenever it suits him. He should tell the Central Statistical Office that the underlying rate—the RPI minus the mortgage rate—has never been published for understandable reasons. I have in my hand a copy of the document which it issues every month on inflation figures. One column states, "RPI—all items" and another states, "RPI—except mortgage interest payments". The answer to my right hon. Friend's question is set out precisely month by month.

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Norman Lamont): No.

Mr. Smith: There can be no dispute about it. The figures for the RPI minus mortgage interest rate payments are in the Central Statistical Office handout. It looks as if we may have to wait for an explanation until the right hon. Gentleman makes his speech.

Why on earth is it difficult to forecast the underlying rate of inflation? I suggest that it is not impossible, that it is just a matter of discretion and that the Chancellor wants to keep vague the criteria that apply. He used to find the RPI uncomfortable and he thinks that it might be in his favour next year; so he wants to go by that and abandon his previous preferred alternatives. *[Interruption.]* As he is explaining it to the Prime Minister—and there is no doubt

[Mr. Smith]

that that is necessary—perhaps he should give us the benefit of that advice. We might take it, unlike the right hon. Lady. The Chancellor is treading on stony ground, as is shown by the record of his predecessors in trying to explain matters to the Prime Minister.

If I had any doubt that the underlying rate is an important issue. I would rely on the evidence of the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, who did not bound to his feet recently, who said on the radio programme "PM" on 11 May that the

"underlying rate was the real thing that matters."

If he is right, let us know what the underlying rate will be next year.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has said various things about this. For example, in June he said that the "rate of inflation appears misleadingly unreasonable".—[*Official Report*, 7 June 1990; Vol. 173, c. 772.]

If it is, he can put it right by giving us the proper criteria. If he does not tell us what criteria we should adopt, we shall not know whether we are back on track, as he says we shall be.

One of the real problems affecting the Government in their handling of economic policy and one of the reasons why there is a leadership contest in the Conservative party is the Government's lack of credibility. That is felt not only by the electorate—something we all know from the responses of our constituents and can see in the movement of the opinion polls—but in the financial markets, which do not believe the Government or their economic purposes. We have seen that in the way that the Government entered the exchange rate mechanism.

Substantial additional evidence of the lack of credibility of the Government and their economic policy was provided by the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East in his remarkable statement to the House yesterday. We know now that the Prime Minister agreed in principle to join the exchange rate mechanism only when she was cornered by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Foreign Secretary and threatened with their resignations unless we joined the ERM. We did not know that before the remarkable speech made by the right hon. and learned Member yesterday. Now, we know that the Prime Minister was taken at pistol point to sign up to join.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): Nonsense.

Mr. Smith: If the right hon. Lady thinks that it is nonsense, then she is casting doubt on the credibility of the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East. I should prefer him as a witness.

We also know, from that dismissive phrase used by the right hon. and learned Gentleman about the Chancellor of the Exchequer using his "considerable talents" to explain away the Madrid conditions, how seriously they were taken by senior Ministers. They knew that it was hocus-pocus from the start. They were there to allow the Prime Minister to look as if she were getting gently off some hook. They had no intention of tempering the Madrid conditions, which is why they were slung away when the decision to enter the ERM was taken.

People know perfectly well, because they have memories, that in that famous Walden interview, the Prime Minister said that the ERM was a higgledy-piggledy system.

Mr. Nicholas Budgen (Wolverhampton, West): Quite right.

Mr. Smith: That sedentary intervention came from one of the Prime Minister's more noted supporters. The No Turning Back group has temporarily found its voice.

The next stage in the credibility problem will come with the hard ecu. I have been listening to various apologists on various sides of the argument appearing on radio and television with great frequency, last night, this morning, over lunchtime. One can hardly turn on a radio or a television without a Cabinet Minister or some other senior figure from the Conservative party offering his views on who should be Prime Minister. Some of us think that that might be something in which the electorate might be interested. For the moment, however, we are denied the test and we have to listen to a parade of views.

Ministers all say one thing, however, and that is this: "There is no real problem about the way forward into Europe because we have the hard ecu, and the hard ecu solves all problems." Does it? There is a fundamental question which we have raised in a previous debate and we shall raise it again today: is the hard ecu an alternative to the single currency or an alternative means of achieving it?

The right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East reminded us yesterday of the Prime Minister's dismissive view of the hard ecu when she reported after the Rome summit. I believe that he said that there was a casual comment and an impulsive answer. I do not know how he would classify it—probably he would say that it was both a casual comment and an impulsive answer—when the Prime Minister said that the hard ecu was not likely to be widely used.

After a little research, I discovered that, when the Prime Minister returned from the Dublin summit in June, when I think the hard ecu proposals were first presented to the other colleagues, she was asked about these matters. She said:

"Our proposals"—

that is, for the hard ecu—

"would lead to a common currency which people could choose to use more or less as they wished, or they could continue to use their own currency. I do not believe that that formula could develop into a single currency."—[*Official Report*, 28 June 1990; Vol. 175, c. 493.]

That is fine. So far, so good. The right hon. Lady said that the formula could not develop into a single currency.

We have had various evasions on the subject by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but I shall not bore the right hon. Gentleman by going through them. I turn instead to the evidence given to the House of Lords Select Committee on European Communities by the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, whom I am glad to see in his place. He was asked about the Government's proposals for the hard ecu. We have him speaking on behalf of the Government while giving evidence to a Select Committee:

"One goes down the path which our proposals map out and can go on from that to a single currency. I think that is the important point to get across, and perhaps this has not yet been fully understood."

I do not think that it has been fully understood by the Prime Minister. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury added:

"I would go on to argue personally that the next stage of having a single currency"—

notice "the next stage of having"—

"could actually happen more quickly by going down this path than by going down any prescribed institutional path, setting up institutions at rigid dates, and trying to make it all happen

that way. That is a personal view and I could well be wrong about it. You could certainly mount a powerful argument that it would be a quicker path."

What is it? Is it a path to a single currency or is it not? If it is, is it a quicker path or a slower path? Well, it could be. Some say one thing and some say another. It is no wonder that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) said at lunchtime today, apparently, that the Prime Minister's difficulty is that she cannot unite the Cabinet behind her European policy. I tell the right hon. Lady that she will not find unity in ambiguity in the way in which she is seeking to approach these matters, by saying that some say one thing and some say another.

Mr. Philip Oppenheim (Amber Valley): The right hon. and learned Gentleman is on dodgy ground.

Mr. Smith: There can be no more dodgy position than the Government's position on Europe. Fundamental ambiguity lies at the heart of the hard ecu proposal. It is a simple point——

Mr. Geoffrey Dickens (Littleborough and Saddleworth): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Smith: No.

Does it or does it not lead to a single currency? Is the hard ecu intended to be a failure as a policy, or a success? We want an answer to that question during the debate. Unless the question is answered, there will remain a lack of credibility on the part of the Government.

Mr. John Townend (Bridlington): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us whether the Opposition are in favour of a single currency and a central European bank?

Mr. Smith: I set out my views on those matters earlier, in the debate on the exchange rate mechanism. *[Interruption.]* The Chief Secretary knows that I can speak for myself. As I said during the debate on the exchange rate mechanism on 23 October——

Mr. Norman Lamont: What was that?

Mr. Smith: The right hon. Gentleman was present for the debate, so he heard what I said.

Mr. Lamont: I did not understand.

Mr. Smith: That is a different matter. Comprehension is entirely a matter for the right hon. Gentleman, and I cannot assist him on that. I can only explain and hope that he comprehends.

Mr. Lamont: Tell me again.

Mr. Smith: We have told the Government time and again, as I did on 23 October, that at a time

"when the gap between Britain's performance and that of other members of the Community is so wide, it would not be prudent to commit ourselves to an irrevocable exchange rate or to a single currency."—[*Official Report*, 23 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 273.]

We have made our views clear. The economic position into which this country has been led by the Government's economic policies is such that there would be a grave risk at this stage if we were linked to an irrevocable exchange rate—*[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may not like the policy that I articulate, but they should not claim that it has not been articulated, because I have clearly done so.

Mr. Dickens: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way in the middle of his entertaining speech. If he ever became Prime Minister—and he has more chance of that than the Leader of the Opposition—would he go to Europe to negotiate, and perhaps move forward to stage 2, when no one could explain exactly what was meant by stage 2? Our Prime Minister is not that sort of person; she wants to know the detail. That is the difference between the two parties.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman should not worry about the leadership of the Labour party. He will have a major problem over the weekend trying to decide who to vote for as the future leader of the Opposition——

Mr. David Shaw (Dover): She is sitting on the Front Bench.

Mr. Smith: That is absolutely right. The hon. Gentleman, not for the first time, accidentally points to the truth. The Prime Minister is sitting on the Front Bench and she may win the leadership struggle, but not the next election, and will then take up office as Leader of the Opposition. I know that it is a chilling thought. At least 100 Tory Members—although the figure may have risen since lunchtime—will find that a fearful thought.

The hon. Member for Littleborough and Saddleworth (Mr. Dickens) says that he cannot understand stage 2 and, what is more, that the Prime Minister does not understand it. In that case, they should ask for the proposals to be clarified. They should not simply walk out of meetings and denounce other people: they should ask intelligently for the proposals to be clarified. They should put questions with persistence, intelligence and perspicacity—but, as the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East advised and admonished them to do, they should continue, within the structure of the European Community, to make Britain's case understood. They should employ constructive diplomacy on behalf of our country.

The real problem in the context of the European Community and the real problem in the context of our domestic economy are virtually one and the same—it is the weakness of our economy after 11 years of Conservative government. I have already mentioned the illusion—

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that we should not worry about the Opposition, but some of us are worried because 180 members of his party—which is practically the whole of his party—believe in the Labour Common Market safeguards committee, which is in total opposition to monetary union and membership of the exchange rate mechanism. Is that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's position?

Mr. Smith: If the right hon. Gentleman is reduced to that sort of remark, which is both pathetic and inaccurate, we can well understand why he had such a short ministerial career, even in a Government headed by the Prime Minister. We are accustomed—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should settle down.

Mr. Smith: As I was pointing out before I was irrelevantly interrupted by the right hon. Gentleman, the big difficulty we face, as he must know—

Mr. Norman Lamont: The right hon. and learned Gentleman explained that it was his view that we should

[Mr. Norman Lamont]

not have a single currency in Europe for the moment. He did not think the time was right. Is there a difference in principle between his policy and the Government's policy on whether we ought to have a single currency?

Mr. Smith: I am not clear what the Government's policy is. Is it the Government's policy to have a single currency? *[Laughter.]* The right hon. Gentleman should stop laughing and address himself to that question. Given our economic conditions, it is premature to decide whether we could be involved in an irrevocably fixed exchange rate. That is the crucial river that has to be crossed. Once that river is crossed, it is difficult to see how one could cross back.

I am told by some Conservative Members that the hard ecu is an alternative to moving to a single currency, and by others I am told that it is a quicker way of getting to a transitional mechanism for moving towards a single currency. I deduce that some members of the Government want a single currency and others do not. We have made it absolutely clear that we would like to see established a number of matters on economic and monetary union which we think are essential components of the type of economic unity within the EC that we want to see. One is a strong regional policy which helps to preserve economic and social cohesion—*[Interruption.]* Perhaps we could rise above the level of schoolboy remarks from the Financial Secretary.

I do not understand how Conservative Members can think that the social cohesion of the EC is such a light matter. In the EC, 11 members think that it is sufficiently important to be regarded as one of the major objectives. It is one of the objectives of the Single European Act, for which Conservative Members voted in the House.

We want to give substance to the ambitions that were enshrined in those proposals for the EC. Of course we want to see a strong regional policy. We also want to see a strong social dimension to the EC, which is why we want to see the social charter, and the social action programme coming on its heels, which the Government seek to block against the wishes of the other 11 members of the Community. That is why we want to see changes in the way in which we decide environmental and social policies.

That policy cannot be encapsulated in one sentence: it is an extremely complex and difficult matter which Labour Members take seriously because it is important for Britain's future. It is a matter on which, according to the right hon. Member for Henley, the Cabinet cannot unite and on which the Government will never be able to unite the country.

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): Let me put to the right hon. and learned Gentleman the proposition that the hard ecu is, in essence, a swift path to the river that one would have to bridge to reach the single currency on the other side. It is a swifter way to arrive at that point of decision. Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman saying that there are circumstances in which he would say that he was satisfied on the conditions for a single currency, or is he saying no to that? In other words, are there circumstances in which he would be willing to give up Britain's unilateral control of its own economic policy?

Mr. Oppenheim: Yes, answer.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman, who is a member of the No Turning Back group, might allow me to reply.

We do not support the proposal for the hard ecu, which is a fundamental issue of ambiguity in the Conservative party. The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) takes the view that he does only because he does not fully comprehend the trick that has been played on Conservative Members by the Foreign Office and others in producing a hard ecu with the purpose of leading to a single currency. When I last spoke on that issue in the debate about the exchange rate mechanism, the right hon. Member for Chingford was sufficiently concerned to ask questions of the Minister then addressing the House, and he was right to be so concerned. However, I cannot answer hypothetical questions about the future.

We will judge progress by the way in which we can achieve a proper regional structure for the European Community and for the social dimension. More important than all of that is the capacity of this country's economy to converge to the European standard. It is one thing to contemplate monetary arrangements of that kind if one has a strong economy, but quite a different thing if one has a weak economy, such as that being run by the present Chancellor of the Exchequer.

One would think from the tenor of the questioning that there is no ambiguity or conflict of policy in the Conservative party. If that is so, why is it having a leadership election? If Conservative Members are all agreed on European Community policies, it is passing strange that the right hon. Member for Henley has chosen to plunge his party into the most divisive leadership contest seen since the end of the war—and perhaps even in the history of the Conservative party. They cannot get away with it as easily as that. It is a question that fundamentally divides the Conservative party, and unless Tory Members can reconcile their differences, it will lead them into continuing difficulty.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): The right hon. and learned Gentleman should look behind him. Labour Members do not understand him, and neither does the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Smith: Conservative Members seated behind the right hon. Gentleman certainly do not understand him.

We should address the fundamental problem affecting Britain here and now—apart from what may happen in developing the economic European Community in four, five, six or seven years' time. Stage 2 is only projected to start in 1994, and further proposals will not come forward before 1997. Anyone would be hard pressed to put a date on some of the decisions that must be made. Nevertheless, they are important decisions, and will have to be taken by the Government of this country at the appropriate time. Meanwhile, here and now—in 1990—there is much that we can do to prepare for our future in the Community, by sorting out the basic problems in the British economy.

Thank goodness that the illusion of 1988—the notion that we had overtaken West Germany and were pressing hard on Japan—has, for reasons of embarrassment, ceased to be advanced by Conservative Members. The truth is that Germany is well ahead of us, France is significantly ahead of us, Italy is overtaking us, and Spain is coming up behind. That is the fruit of 11 years of Conservative stewardship of our economy.

The economy will not be put right by the policies in the Gracious Speech, whose most alarming aspect is that it promises no change in Government policy. Now, at the end of a decade, we have a massive balance of payments deficit, the highest interest and inflation rates of any industrialised country, and rising unemployment.

It is not the first time that Britain has faced economic problems under a Conservative Government. I occasionally read publications produced by the City—some from institutes that are sympathetic to the Conservative party, but others that are more objective. The Greenwell Montagu gilt-edged research paper, "UK inflation in the 1990s", highlights the tendency of British Governments

"to over-expand demand and to preside over periods of over-rapid expansion, mistaking them for the beginning of the catching up of British economic performance with those of our competitors and the beginning of a virtuous circle."

We have not heard those phrases from the Conservative party.

The report continues:

"There have been three phases of this sort, all of which had serious consequences.

(a) Maudling's dash for growth 1963-64;
(b) Barber's boom, 1972-73;
(c) The Lawson boom, 1986-88."

We are back in the stop phase of stop-go economics for the third time under Conservative guidance of the British economy. The Government tell us, as we are stuck in the stop of yet another stop-go following the depressing and worrying cycle of economic mismanagement, that we will soon be back on track.

How can we be back on track when, even in the midst of a recession in 1990-91, the Treasury predicted a balance of payments deficit of £11 billion? Under the previous Chancellor, it was argued that the terrible balance of payments figures were the result of excessive demand and a so-called investment boom. Those are not occurring in 1990-91, yet we still have massive balance of payments deficits.

Does it never occur to the Government that we need a change of policy, not merely because it has not worked under this Government but because it has not worked under previous Conservative Governments? We end up in difficult economic situations, and the Labour party has to be elected to deal with them. It has happened before. The cycle mentioned by the learned authors of the Greenwell Montagu report is not complete. Usually it has to be completed by the British electorate. We are facing such a problem now and we shall have to tackle the underlying problems of the British economy. No one seriously believes that this is some minor matter of a mismatch of demand and supply. There are serious structural defects in the British economy, which require a supply-side policy to deal with them.

As, regrettably, unemployment rises in the regions and nations of Britain, the need for a regional policy will become more manifest, and its neglect even more apparent. Just before I came into the debate today, I met representatives of 500 workers of James Howden, a company in Renfrew in Scotland. Five hundred people are facing redundancy there in a modern factory, which was opened by the Prime Minister in 1981 and which is widely regarded as having the best of technological excellence. Five hundred people will lose their jobs. That is what is happening in Britain today.

Let not the Government tell us that there is no recession and that this is some temporary problem—let them look into the faces of the people who are facing redundancy and tell us. Let the Government understand the consequences of their economic policies. This is not really an academic matter, as it affects the living standards and life opportunities of all the citizens of this country. The longer we continue to neglect the fragile technological base of British industry, the longer it will take us to match our competitors and to get up speed for Europe. The longer we neglect education and training the more difficult our problems will be.

In another report that I came across, Mr. David Lomax, the group economic adviser for National Westminster bank, described the Government's training record as "execrable". I do not think that any Opposition Member has thought of such a dismissive and abusive term, and that quarter is not entirely unsympathetic to the Government.

In powerful speeches yesterday, my hon. Friends the Shadow Education and Employment Secretaries outlined the major defects in Government policy and the Labour party's proposals for proper education and training. As we prepare for 1992, it is crucial that we get those things right, that we pay attention to building up the technological base of British industry, that we have a strong and vigorous regional policy and a new commitment to education and training, and that we give the manufacturing sector of the British economy the place it should have had during the neglected decade of the 1980s.

The Opposition intend to build for success in Britain and in Europe. We have a vision of a fair society in which world class public services provide the best of facilities for all our citizens—a society in which care and compassion are active ingredients in social policies and where those least able to help themselves are given a helping hand by the rest of the community. We shall fight for that vision within Britain and within the European Community, but we also know that Britain cannot achieve these ambitions, which we hold on behalf of all our people, without a strong economy. That is why we shall tackle the problem of rebuilding the British economy patiently, purposefully, determinedly, year in and year out. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Smith: I shall explain to Conservative Members how we shall do so, and set out our targets for the supply-side regeneration of the economy. I shall set out what we have in mind. I fear that the Conservative party's problem is not merely one of comprehension, but one of understanding what the people of this country want. They want a strong economy and a fair society. Other European Community countries seem to be able to achieve those aims. The British people want that deeply, passionately and urgently. That is why they are turning in such large numbers to the Labour party, in order to make sure that a Labour Government are elected at the first available opportunity.

4.19 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. John Major): Fond though I am of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), we have just heard the shallowest speech from the Opposition Front Bench for years. Stale jokes and cheap gibes are no policy for any Opposition who ever hope to form a Government. The right hon. and learned Gentleman spelt out his usual long

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litany of criticisms of the Government, but he did not set out in any detail, or in any sense at all, clear policies on what needs to be done.

In "Meet the Challenge: Make the Change" and in "Looking to the Future", the Labour party claims to have a selection of policies of which it is proud. So proud is the Labour party of those policies that Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen hardly ever mention them. What we get from them is absolutely nothing at all about the success of British industry over the past decade. They do not congratulate British industry on its record investment over the past decade. They never mention the dramatic improvements that British management and the British work force have brought about in terms of increased productivity. The trouble with the Labour party is that what is good for the country is bad for it, and it recognises that all the time.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Major: I shall with great pleasure give way to the hon. Gentleman a little later.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the quotation by my right hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Mr. Baker) from Shakespeare's "Henry V". As I listened to the right hon. and learned Gentleman it was another, lesser-known poet, rejoicing in the name of John Gay, who sprang to my mind. John Gay was a master of burlesque. The right hon. and learned Gentleman may recall that he wrote:

"I know you lawyers can, with ease,
Twist words and meanings as you please;".

[Interruption.] Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen seem to be remarkably boisterous when their policies have no credibility whatever.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned the underlying rate of inflation. Of course we published in our document both the retail prices index and the underlying rate of inflation after the event. That is the information that he had. What I said to the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), which he will understand as a former Treasury Minister, was that we never forecast the underlying rate of inflation for a sound economic reason. As we forecast the retail prices index, if we were also to forecast the underlying rate of inflation it would be possible to calculate interest rate assumptions, with very severe market effects. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne understands that. It is a pity that the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer does not understand it, too.

Mr. John Smith: Will the right hon. Gentleman answer a simple question? How should we judge whether or not he is successful next year—by the retail prices index or by the underlying rate of inflation?

Mr. Major: In due course the right hon. and learned Gentleman will see by both measures, and by the producer price index, how successful we are. The way to judge the success of policies is to see what the outturn of those policies is. I am content to be judged in that way.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman also referred, with a total lack of self-knowledge, to what he rather crudely called "Lawson's boom". I seem to recall that in 1987 and 1988 the right hon. and learned Gentleman was asking for ever lower interest rates to increase demand.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): I understand why the right hon. Gentleman did not wish to give the underlying rate. It is the same argument as was used against giving the retail prices index and unemployment figures many months in advance. Of course, we have the autumn statement, which gives much more information and I could not understand why he was so coy about giving this further information to the House.

Mr. Major: It was precisely for the reason that I have just given. If I gave the underlying rate of inflation forecast and the retail prices index forecast, it would be easy for anybody to calculate interest rate assumptions. The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne will know that that is not an attractive proposition.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East made a great deal of the short-term problems that he perceives we have. He ignored the growth that we have had over the past eight years, the growth this year and the growth that we shall have again next year. Alas, he neglected to mention that. Of course, he wants to portray prospects as black as he can because he knows that, when inflation is heading down, we shall return to sustainable growth and a stronger economy.

That is what concerns the right hon. and learned Gentleman. He knows that economic success for his country will mean political failure for his party. He knows very well that recovery is not just possible but probable because the underlying economy is incomparably stronger than it was a decade ago. Industry knows that, too. Last week John Banham addressed the Confederation of British Industry conference and said:

"We must believe in ourselves and build on what has been achieved . . . We must not let our present difficulties obliterate the memory of the past 10 years. And this is precisely what is in danger of happening."

Indeed it is. It is partly because Opposition Members see party advantage in denying the changes and improvements of the past decade.

We should not be blind to the improvements that have taken place. Business investment has risen dramatically.

Mr. Neil Kinnock (Islwyn): Manufacturing investment?

Mr. Major: Over the three years to 1989, business investment rose by 45 per cent., which is an unprecedented increase. It is hardly surprising that that is not sustainable at this stage of the economic cycle. However, even assuming the modest downturn that we forecast this year and next, business investment will still be over 50 per cent. higher than when the Government took office in 1979. Over the past decade, the economy has grown faster than France or Germany. That is the first post-war decade in which that has happened. Also, living standards have risen enormously, with the real take-home pay of a married man with two children up by a third since 1979.

Mr. Kinnock: This is a fraud.

Mr. Major: I ask the Leader of the Opposition, who is muttering: which of those improvements are inaccurate and why do he and his right hon. and learned Friend never acknowledge them? Why do not they offer some real hope for our prospects in the 1990s? My statements are accurate and the Leader of the Opposition knows it.

Mr. Giles Radice (Durham, North) *rose*——

Mr. Major: I shall give way a little later.

I do not believe for a second that those achievements will vanish. They are fundamental and they will last. With other supply side improvements, they will improve Britain's economic fortunes throughout the 1990s. Do not be deceived. Our prospects in the medium and longer term remain excellent. In the 1990s we shall see the huge investment of the past few years bearing fruit as new capacity comes on stream; provided that firms remain competitive by containing their costs, it will continually help to close the current account deficit.

I am wholly determined that the British economy will be ready for the challenges that lie ahead of us in the 1990s. I am wholly determined that we shall take the difficult decisions necessary now to ensure that it is. That is why we joined the exchange rate mechanism. That is why we shall stick with the tough policies that we have pursued and why I have no intention of reducing interest rates until I am satisfied that it is safe to do so.

Mr. D. N. Campbell-Savours (Workington) *rose*——

Mr. Major: I shall give way in a moment.

High interest rates, although painful, are bringing the slowdown in demand that is necessary to reduce inflationary pressures. As for our forecasts, as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East who now clearly reads so much that is published in the City, will know, the overwhelming majority of analysts now agree with our forecast that inflation will come down next year to around 5·5 per cent. by the fourth quarter, and we intend then to keep it there.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Does the Chancellor agree with the former deputy Prime Minister who said yesterday that failure to enter the ERM in 1986 had been inflationary and had led to inflation?

Mr. Major: No, Sir, and for the reason, which should appeal to the hon. Gentleman, that if we had entered the exchange rate mechanism at that time, we should have done so at a rate against the deutschmark of about 3·30 and 3·85. I am not convinced that it would have been the right time to enter. The right time to enter was when we entered. The moment the opportunity was there, we took the opportunity on the first available occasion when I judged that it was safe to do so.

Mr. Skinner: On entering, will the Chancellor tell us whether he is prepared to take out his bat first wicket down?

Mr. Major: So far as I am aware, the opening batsman is well played in and will stay there, I hope, for a long time to come.

The current account deficit, to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman referred and in which he has apparently lost interest, so narrow is his span of interest, is now narrowing as a result of the low growth of import volumes combined with a substantially stronger growth of exports.

Mr. Gordon Brown (Dunfermline, East): It was £16 billion.

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman says that it was £16 billion. He is the hon. Gentleman who, at one stage, was forecasting that it would be more than £20 billion this year. So much for accurate forecasts.

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Major: I shall give way to a former Lambethan.

Mr. Livingstone: On the record of changes over the past decade, will the Chancellor comment on the fact that over that decade the proportion of our GDP going in exports has dropped by 3·5 per cent. of total GDP? Is that not the problem we face? What does the right hon. Gentleman propose to do to change that?

Mr. Major: As the hon. Gentleman will know, the trend has been reversing itself, and exports have been growing substantially faster than imports over the past year or so and are projected to continue to do so. The expansion of growth of demand, actually sucked in more imports that domestic supply could not produce, but with the collapse and reduction of demand, it is moving back into equilibrium at a rapid rate.

The slowdown in the economy points again to the trade deficit narrowing still further next year to around 1·75 per cent. of GDP.

Mr. Radice: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Major: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have already given way more often than the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East. If he behaves himself, I may give way to him later.

That trade deficit compares, for example, with Spain's current account deficit of 3·5 per cent. of GDP, which perhaps puts ours in a better perspective.

As I made clear to the House last week, we intend to continue to maintain a tight fiscal stance both to support monetary policy and to squeeze inflation. By the end of 1990-91 we expect to have repaid £29 billion-worth of public sector debt over four years. That will save £2·75 billion in interest payments every year, the equivalent of a penny-ha'penny off the standard rate of income tax. We now expect a lower debt repayment this year than I had forecast in March at the time of the Budget, and lower than we enjoyed last year. But it is perhaps not only unusual but remarkable and encouraging that, at this stage of the economic cycle, with activity weakening, our central forecast for debt repayment amounts to £3 billion. Germany, for example, so often quoted against us as a virtuous economy, is likely to have a deficit this year in excess of 3 per cent. of GNP, while France's deficit this year is likely to be about 1·25 of GNP.

As the autumn statement showed, we have not loosened our grip on public expenditure. We have made the difficult choices that were necessary and are not accommodating fully the higher than expected inflation either this year or in the planning totals that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary negotiated for the next three years. Instead of seeing a surge in the ratio of public expenditure to national income, as we have in past economic downturns, our plans maintain a stable ratio until 1993-94, when we expect it to resume its downward movement.

Despite that restraint, within the overall settlement we have been able to keep our word and have not reneged on the spending commitments that we made. There has been

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room for more resources to be allocated to key areas, especially to protect the more vulnerable groups in society. We have been able to maintain the real value of benefits that are paid to 10 million pensioners and 11 million people on income-related benefits; we have been able to increase spending on health between this year and next by £3 billion, which is a real increase of 5 per cent.; we have enabled British Rail and London Regional Transport to spend nearly £750,000,000 on safety measures in the next three years; and there has been an increase in provision for capital expenditure of £1·5 billion.

Nor, in addition to those increases, have we overlooked the self-evident uncertainties in the world economy or at home. In view of those, we have set aside higher reserves in the next three years—up to £10·5 billion in the third year.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow) *rose*——

Mr. Major: Will the hon. Gentleman forgive me? I want to make a little progress.

While Opposition Members speak at length about the problems that we face, as we saw from the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East, they are a little less clear, to put it kindly, about how to solve them. Their industrial strategy would not do so.

Mr. Radice: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Major: If the hon. Gentleman behaves himself, later.

Labour's industrial strategy amounts to a familiar programme of detailed intervention.

Mr. John Smith: This is the House of Commons.

Mr. Major: The right hon. and learned Gentleman says that this is the House of Commons. As he is sitting on the Front Bench, perhaps he should behave as though it were the House of Commons. Is it not interesting that every time we get to Labour's policies, Labour Members seek to disrupt whomsoever is at the Dispatch Box? Is that not because they know precisely what is in their policy documents, and what political poison it is? I am perfectly prepared to stay here until they keep silent so that we can discuss the policies that they will not talk about. In their document——

Mr. Radice *rose*——

Mr. Major: As the hon. Gentleman is unable to contain himself, I shall give way.

Mr. Radice: I thank the Chancellor for at last giving way. Will he answer the question put by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith): Is the economy now in recession, or is it not?

Mr. Major: If the hon. Gentleman is aware of the classic definition of recession—two quarters of falling output—he will know that it is impossible to know until we have the output figures for those two quarters, and we do not yet have those figures. If he wishes to know whether I think that it is probable that there will have been a downturn in output over two quarters, I have said several times that I think that it is probable. But I shall not know until the output figures are produced, and neither does the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East.

Let us return to Labour's industrial strategy. In its document, "Meet the Challenge, Make the Change", there is the quite extraordinary admission—this is from the new model Labour party—that the market can be tolerated only

"providing the Government regulates it."

So much for supply side socialism and for the new model Labour party. I dare say so much, too, for the right hon. and learned Gentleman's agreeable lunches in the City, if it reads his document.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman (Lancaster): He is chewing now.

Mr. Major: The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East spoke for a long time—he is probably very hungry.

What of the policies that would bring about this industrial renaissance from Labour? Let me tell my right hon. and hon. Friends what they are: a new national investment bank, a series of tax incentives to encourage investment, an enhanced regional policy, a British technology enterprise fund and, of course, and not to be missed, an increased role for regional enterprise boards and development agencies, all peopled with Labour's placemen.

Some hon Members with long memories may think that that list has a familiar ring to it, and so it should. For medium-term industrial strategy, read Harold Wilson's national plan. The new terminology, brushed up and dusted down, may better fit the 1990s, but the policy would not. It failed in the 1960s and 1970s and would be equally disastrous if it were ever tried again in the 1990s.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East mentioned unemployment. As for the labour market, this is a time when domestic conditions, reinforced by membership of the ERM, demand both wage flexibility and wage restraint. The whole of Europe seeks such flexibility—except, of course, the Labour party. I quote from "Looking to the Future". The Labour party argues that

"there are . . . dangers in flexibility"

for the labour market. Perhaps Labour thinks that there are merits in inflexibility. The whole of Europe is wrong and the Labour party is right. The Labour party has proposed its old friend, a minimum wage, at two thirds of national male average earnings, which would cause the loss of thousands of jobs for people on modest incomes —so much for Labour's plans for the vulnerable.

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): Can my right hon. Friend estimate to what level manufacturers' costs would rise because of that policy and the effect on inflation if we were to have a Labour Government?

Mr. Major I cannot do that. Although I carefully read the Labour party's document, alas I found no such costing in it to show that.

Of course, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is right to say that he wants more investment and more saving. I wholly agree. That is certainly the right objective. The question is, how shall we get it? We shall certainly not get it with his policies—not with plans to increase capital gains taxes, to introduce a new form of capital transfer tax and to reintroduce an investment income surcharge. I offer this thought to the right hon. and learned Gentleman—one cannot encourage savings by penalising the saver. One does not encourage

investment by damaging saving. All Labour's tax incentives would achieve is a distortion of investment decisions, damaging the quality and quantum of investment and reducing the return that it yields. That is what happened under the Labour Government in the 1960s and 1970s, yet Labour wants to try it again—no doubt, a crypto-policy.

Labour's medium-term industrial strategy amounts to three things: savings—Labour will tax them; investment—Labour will distort it; the labour market—Labour will cripple it. All that is quite apart—*[Interruption.]* It is much more in the Queen's Speech than anything that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East said. All that is quite apart from the fact that the Labour party has no credible policies to tackle inflation. Labour would not use a tight fiscal policy or high interest rates—that much is clear. For Labour, interest rates at any level are always too high and public expenditure at any level is always too low.

For a while, the Labour party tried to shore up its credentials by saying that it would join the ERM, although only—let it be noted—on conditions that would transform the whole system. Now that option has gone. Labour now has only one distinctive policy left—the imposition of credit controls—and even that is withering away. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East admitted that controls would not be "hermetically sealed". I think that saying that they would not be "hermetically sealed" is his way of admitting that they would not work. They would not. That is why they have been ditched all over Europe—by the French, the Italians, the Dutch and the rest of Europe.

In recent months, policy on Europe and the debate on economic and monetary union have occupied centre stage. That is not surprising, for there is a great deal at stake in economic and monetary union. But the rapid push towards the Delors version of economic and monetary union owes almost everything to pressures for closer political integration in the Community and very little to the fundamental need for deeper economic and monetary integration. That was the message from the Rome Council, but it is the wrong way to approach such important and far-reaching decisions. What is needed is a constructive, practical and pragmatic approach. That is the approach that the Community has been following over the past five years or so. It has built on the undoubted discipline of the exchange rate mechanism, with the deutschmark providing the anchor. The result has been an impressive degree of convergence on low inflation in much of Europe.

Our proposals are—agreed by the whole Government—to continue that successful evolutionary approach in the further moves now under discussion towards economic and monetary integration.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): Will the right hon. Gentleman be a runner in the second ballot for the Tory leadership? Will he make that clear?

Mr. Major: The hon. Gentleman is in no position to yell from a sedentary position. There is not even agreement on the Bench upon which he sits on this issue. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members might as well agree with our policy, for it is clear that their party has none. That is why we have put forward our proposals for a European monetary fund and a parallel currency. They are practical and realistic and they will promote convergence and economic integration beyond stage 1. Most important, they will enable the 12 member states of the Community to move forward together. That is an important development.

The fact that some European figures attack our proposals should not worry us. They do so because our proposals are gaining ground—*[Interruption.]* The Opposition may not like it, but there is no point in people attacking policies that are not gathering ground. It is because our policies are gathering ground that some people attack them. I believe that they will win more adherents as the intergovernmental conference gets down to details. One of the points upon which we and our partners agreed at the Rome Council was that there needs to be a substantial next stage, which should involve the further development of the ecu. At present, the only worked-up proposals for stage 2 are ours and the Spanish proposals, which are built upon ours and are similar to ours.

The IGC, which starts next month, will determine the future direction of the Community. It is therefore of enormous importance not just for this country but for the Community as a whole and for the wider Europe. We face some difficult negotiations—that is undeniable—but the House should remember that we are in the middle of the process. The IGC has not yet started. There is a long way to go. We should not underestimate for a second the strong desire both here and among our partners that we should not be sidelined in any way. Our European partners want the United Kingdom in the centre of the Community. We have played a leading role in recent years in the creation of an open Community based on free trade and the abolition of barriers.

Our partners know that, and they know, too, that that would not have been achieved but for the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I am convinced that we can and should continue to play that constructive and central role and that we shall be able to agree on a way forward on economic and monetary union that is acceptable to all 12 member states and, crucially, equally acceptable to right hon. and hon. Members who have a direct interest in what is determined.

We must not trivialise the debate. The Leader of the Opposition, when asked about a single currency—perhaps one of the most important issues before the country for years—said:

> "We can certainly have the Queen's head on our currency. I would be very much in favour of doing that."

That is nice to know. It is good to see a precise appreciation of these complex points, but when pressed on that and asked whether he thought that as long as the Queen's head was on the coin it would not matter if there were a common currency or a single currency, the right hon. Gentleman said:

> "That is the whole point that Leon Brittan and Jacques Delors and everybody else has made."

Actually, it was not: their points were altogether deeper, but let that pass.

Do not the Opposition comprehend the seriousness of this issue? The Delors report advocates a single monetary policy controlled by a non-resident bank that might be independent and not answerable to national Parliaments. That would be imposed by politicians, not decided by choice. Do not the Opposition realise that, whatever is stamped on either side of a coin, that coin must have a single unvarying value in terms of all other Community currencies? Those are issues of vital importance to

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Parliament and our future, and they deserve much more than the right hon. Gentleman's glib answers to questions that he does not understand. He clearly does not understand what he would commit us to were he in government. He would simply follow the lead of others and join the end of the queue without having the faintest idea what he was queueing for: "The other 11 people seem to know, so it must be right—we will join the queue." That is the limit of the right hon. Gentleman's understanding.

We know what is at stake, however: the whole future direction, composition and nature of the European Community. I believe that we must be a part of it, building, developing and shaping it. Our partners believe that too, which is why I am confident that we shall be able to negotiate a way to success in the intergovernmental conference that starts shortly.

The current slowdown in the economy is in no sense comfortable but it is absolutely necessary, and once it is over, once inflation is heading downwards again and growth is picking up, as will happen, we shall put our problems behind us and begin to build on the formidable array of our achievements of the past decade. For when people get the chance to choose once again between a party that has principles and a party that has abandoned them, between a party that delivers freedom and a party that inhibits it, between a party that builds prosperity and one that merely seeks to redistribute it, I believe that they will vote for the consistency, courage and conviction with which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has led this country so successfully for so long.

Mr. Nicholas Bennett (Pembroke): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your advice about remarks made by the Leader of the Opposition during my right hon. Friend's speech.

When my right hon. Friend was giving the House some statistics about the increase in business investment in the past few years and the relative success of the British economy compared with France and Germany—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. I must hear the point of order, and the hon. Gentleman must come to a point of order with which the Chair can deal.

Mr. Bennett: Once my right hon. Friend had given those good news statistics, the Leader of the Opposition was distinctly heard to say that they are a fake. That was clearly a reflection on my right hon. Friend and his officials. Would the right hon. Gentleman care to withdraw the remark?

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not a point of order for the Chair. It may be a debating point, but the Chair has no responsibility for that.

4.53 pm

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): That point of order further illustrated the fact that proceedings in the House have had a slightly unreal air about them ever since the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) changed the course of events by his personal statement yesterday afternoon. The result of that statement was to throw wide open the chasm in the Conservative party on Europe, an issue which should be central to the Gracious Speech and which is central to the future of this country. Yet the same issue divides the Labour party as firmly as it divides the Conservative party. The remarks that the right hon. and learned Gentleman made about stretching language to accommodate different points of view, true as they are of the Government, were shown to be equally true as the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) sought to explain his position on certain fundamental European questions this afternoon.

I cannot believe that the Chancellor—who, fortunately for him, was not interrupted by any background noise from those immediately around him this afternoon—has no view as to what the nature of a future European monetary system should be. I cannot believe that he imagines a European monetary system with divided responsibility for monetary policy in which the politicians of any one country, or indeed the Council of Ministers, could undermine sound money by continually interfering in the running of monetary policy by a central bank. If the Chancellor has such a view, I wish that he would expound it and explain how his hard ecu system would work.

The issue may be academic, but it is interesting to examine what the Chancellor's real views are. I say that it is academic because it does not have a hope, but if the Chancellor believes that it is a serious contender perhaps he will explain what would happen if a member country with substantial public sector deficits decided to go on printing more and more money and exchange it into hard ecus at whatever value the bank cared to name. Sooner or later the central banking institution—the Eurofed—would say to that country, "Sorry, the game is up—you cannot run public sector deficits like that and take part in our scheme, so we shall interfere with your supposedly sovereign power and stop this continuing."

Inherent in the right hon. Gentleman's scheme is the very denial of sovereignty which worries the Prime Minister so much. I find this one of the necessary and acceptable parts of the scheme. It is not possible to run such a system without getting away from the possibility that any one country could print money, but the Prime Minister clings tenaciously to the desire to be able to print money on whatever terms she or her successors choose.

This is why no form of words and no structure can paper over the differences. Perhaps the Chancellor would not be in a position to insist that his scheme was seriously workable unless he put his hat into the ring and won, but unless he does so there is no hope of his scheme being taken seriously.

I wish to concentrate on a few key points in what I hope will be a brief contribution. The first is growth, and what the Chancellor said about it. He spoke today about the prospects for improved growth in the latter part of next year. I do not understand how he deduces that from what he forecasts about current events. He talks of an average growth of 0·5 per cent., yet from that he concludes that he can achieve 2 per cent. growth at some time in the year. I do not know what he means by that figure, unless it be that there will be a substantial spurt of growth in the economy in the latter part of next year. Is that to be achieved by a careless policy on interest rates? It certainly does not flow logically from what the right hon. Gentleman has described as happening in the economy so far.

For that growth to happen at all, there would have to be, as the right hon. Gentleman himself concluded a high

level of investment. He assumes that investment will remain on a plateau, but how will it do that if, as he already forecasts, the margins for business are effectively halved in the course of the year? How will a high level of investment be achieved from lower profitability? Put together, the Chancellor's forecasts do not appear to add up.

I am worried that the Chancellor does not show any real anxiety about the likely level of underlying inflation next year. It is not true that he has failed to forecast the underlying rate. His denials are unnecessary, because, when answering me during exchanges on the autumn statement on 8 November, he said:

"I expect underlying inflation also to fall next year . . . to broadly the level of the headline rate."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 126.]

If that is not a forecast, I do not know what is, but it is a forecast that our underlying inflation will be roughly double that of our main competitors. The Chancellor may want to bask in the glow of lower headline inflation, but he must recognise that what he knows to be continuing high underlying inflation is a serious problem for the British economy and one to which he has not yet forecast a solution.

Part of the solution to that problem lies in the very disciplines that his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister finds so irksome—the disciplines involved in the kind of system being run by our European partners. Thus we get into the area opened up by the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East. In passing, I wish to pay tribute to something that has not been mentioned so far—the right hon. and learned Gentleman's work as Leader of the House. I worked closely with him in the House of Commons Commission and his work will stand the House in very good stead and will prove, to be of real and lasting benefit.

Having worked closely with the right hon. and learned Gentleman, I always found him to be a reliable and sound witness. When matters are in dispute, I am inclined to accept his view, particularly when it comes to describing what happened in the Government five years ago. At that stage, the right hon. and learned Gentleman decided that we should be part of the exchange rate mechanism. I am not quite sure from what he said whether the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) had reached that decision then, but we need not worry too much about that, as he arrived at the conclusion shortly afterwards.

Five years ago, the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East decided that we should be part of the European monetary system's exchange rate mechanism. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I sensed that that was right, and on 29 January 1986 we tabled a motion to the effect that this country should enter the exchange rate mechanism. The Government strongly resisted the idea that we should join, and a vote was taken on the matter. I am pleased to tell the House that the hon. Member for Clwyd, North-West (Sir A. Meyer) voted with us on that occasion. The right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) voted against the motion. The right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East was mysteriously absent and did not vote but abstained—like the entire Labour party, which at that time was a long way from having anything like a policy on the exchange rate mechanism.

The Prime Minister might like to borrow the words used by the hon. Member for Sedgefield (Mr. Blair) when we debated that motion in 1986. The hon. Member for Sedgefield is generally regarded as one of the more European enthusiasts in the Labour shadow Cabinet. He said:

"The first consequence is that the EMS is essentially a deutschmark bloc. It could be said that we would be putting Herr Pohl of the Bundesbank in 11 Downing street. He might be preferable to the present incumbent, but we should yield our freedom of action."—[*Official Report*, 29 January 1986; Vol. 90, c. 990.]

The views of the shadow Cabinet bear an extraordinary similarity to those of the Prime Minister. We should have joined the exchange rate mechanism much earlier. Had we done so, we would not now be paying such a high price. We would not have had high interest rates or high inflation for so long. Following our recent decision to join, we would not now be unable to reduce interest rates further because, were we to do so, we would hit the bottom margin of our wide band in the exchange rate mechanism.

The Government must face up to the issues about a single currency and a central bank. As the Chancellor said with reference to the Leader of the Opposition, those are not issues about whose head appears on bank notes. The Chancellor cannot simply accuse the Leader of the Opposition of basing his arguments on that point because the Prime Minister is also worried about the head on bank notes. She is worried about the title of the pound sterling. She sounds more and more like Harold Wilson in his latter years.

The issue at stake is whether we are to have sound money. Are we to have a currency in which people will want to be paid because it is sound? If many of my constituents were offered the choice of being paid in deutschmarks or in sterling, and were given even the briefest sign of what the relative values of the currencies were likely to be, they would probably opt to be paid in deutschmarks. They might prefer to have the money printed in a more familiar form, just as many of them now use Scottish pound notes which, rightly, do not have the Queen's head on them. They are interested in the value of the currency.

Will their savings decrease in value? Will they be able to buy next year what they could buy this year with the little that they have pout away for retirement? That is the kind of guarantee that the Government's present policies cannot give my constituents.

Mr. Tebbit: Do the hon. Gentleman's constituents have any interest in whether they should have the right, as citizens of this kingdom, to fire the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the day, whether he is a British Chancellor or, under the idealised system promoted by the hon. Gentleman, a Eurofed Chancellor?

Mr. Beith: My constituents have watched in fascination as the Prime Minister has parted with Chancellors and senior Ministers of all kinds. They do not feel closely involved in those decisions as to who is to hold senior office in the Government, which have clearly depended more on disagreements within the Government.

The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) persists in using that argument without facing the central issue. Germany is no less a democracy because its Parliament has entrusted to its central bank the responsibility for maintaining sound money. The German Finance Minister is no less subject to dismissal because his Parliament has entrusted to its central bank a duty and responsibility to promote price stability and sound money. We should be in a better position in this country if our

[Mr. Beith]

central bank had that responsibility. We should be in a better position in future if European monetary policy were determined on that basis rather than on a basis which allows the politicians of the day to manipulate the soundness of money to meet the timetable for an election or other short-term considerations.

It is not possible to sustain the argument about sovereignty without recognising how much Britain will lose if it continues to assume that the best interests of its citizens lie in the ability to pretend that we can ignore what is going on in the rest of the world economy when setting out interest rates or determining what happens to our currency.

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): With regard to the independence of the banks and particularly the Bundesbank, why did Helmut Kohl, when East and West Germany were reunified, allow the ostmark and the deutschmark to be interchangeable—one for one up to a limit of 5,000 and one for two thereafter? That was a political decision taken by Helmut Kohl. Where is the independence of the Bundesbank in that? The president of the Bundesbank did not care for that arrangement.

Mr. Beith: That clearly shows how circumscribed and precise is the independence enjoyed by the Bundesbank. It has autonomous responsibility for price stability, but it is not responsible for deciding the terms upon which West Germany unites with East Germany. The head of the Bundesbank is not the Chancellor of the Exchequer, still less the Chancellor of the Federal Republic. His responsibility is clearly defined—to ensure that, at the end of the day, he presides over a sound currency, which is something that successive British Chancellors of the Exchequer have failed to do.

I do not know how much longer, under the current leadership or under any foreseen leadership, the Government will remain impaled on the view that British sovereignty and the distinctive British character depend on preserving the Chancellor's ability to distort and debase our currency. I do not believe that the Government can sustain any serious anti-inflation policy unless they change that view.

Mr. Skinner: The hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), like many of his hon. Friends, has for years been trying to explain that his party wants to hand over powers to the Common Market and to Germany, in particular with regard to currency. How does he square that with the fact that one of the first Liberal motions this Session is to sustain a Welsh Parliament?

Mr. Beith: I am more and more amazed. Admittedly, the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is at odds with some members of his own party on this issue. However, he cannot understand that it is possible to have decisions taken within Europe at the lowest possible level and for decisions to be taken in Wales by a Welsh Parliament and in Scotland by a Scottish Parliament. Such decisions are being taken in Europe all the time.

If the hon. Member for Bolsover believes that the British Government currently have maximum control over the pursuit of our interests in Europe, he is very much mistaken. The Bundesbank takes decisions which have a very powerful impact on our economy. I would much rather be part of a central bank and monetary system which was much more influenced by our own traditions and ways because we were part of it, but I would nevertheless like it to enjoy the kind of independence that has enabled Germany to have a much lower rate of inflation for so long. Those who deride and disagree with that view should consider what has happened in other countries. Germany is no less a democracy for having pursued that kind of system, but it is a very much more successful economy for having pursued it.

Many Tory Members are profoundly unhappy with the Prime Minister's approach on Europe, although not many of them are intervening this afternoon. I wish to make them an offer. We in the Liberal Democratic party have tabled an amendment to the Loyal Address which is the ideal vehicle for those who wish to show that they believe that Britain should play a positive role in Europe. It may be that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) is not the man for them, but they do not wish at this stage to be identified with any particular candidate.

As I go round the House, I find that that seems to be a widespread view. There are many who want a change but do not want their name attached to any particular candidate. I invite them to join us in the Division Lobby to

"regret the absence from the Gracious Speech of any coherent policy to secure for the people of the United Kingdom the benefits of the economic, monetary and political union of the European Community."

At least some Members of Parliament, and many more people outside the House, realise that that is where our future lies.

5.10 pm

Mr. Nicholas Ridley (Cirencester and Tewkesbury): Yesterday my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) included in his speech the fact that matters of substance were partially the reason for his resignation, else, he said, he would be

"the first Minister in history who has resigned because he was in full agreement with Government policy."

I must lay claim to that title myself. *[Laughter.]* I hope that the House will let me explain my views on this matter, although I do not expect to be heard in silence and without interruption, as my right hon. and learned Friend was yesterday.

This morning I again searched my right hon. and learned Friend's speech for the difference of substance between what he feels and Government policy. I cannot quite see what it is that prevents him from being the second Minister to resign because he was in full agreement with Government policy. He said:

"none of us wants the imposition of a single currency."—[*Official Report*, 13 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 461-3.]

That is true of the Government, the official Opposition and the majority of the country, but not of the Liberals. There are some fundamental reasons why that should be so and we should analyse them before we see this matter in terms of the fervour of one's Europeanism or the refusal to face up to the realities of the economic world.

As Mr. Pohl, an eminent witness, has said, this will lead to a federal system in due course. Another economic expert, who is not embroiled in the present dispute, John Maynard Keynes, said:

"Whoever controls the currency, controls the Government."

To take control of the monetary, fiscal and budgetary weapons is to control the entire economic management of an economy. These are grave issues. The spectre of a country whose Government lose control of such vital matters is one that we should not toss aside lightheartedly, as the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) did as proof of his European virility.

I do not rest my argument on the point about sovereignty. I have no objection to pooling sovereignty. However, when we are asked to pool a bit of sovereignty, we should ensure that we can afford to do without it. We should not contemplate losing the piece of sovereignty which concerns the management of our currency.

Why is that so? The Community has weak and strong states and nations. Within large states, there are weak and strong regions and areas. The weaker peripheral parts of a community with a single currency will always find it hard to match the rate of productivity increase in the rich areas. That is multiplied, because high wages cause high investment to get rid of high wage costs. Low wages do not cause such high investment, because wage costs are low and the machinery is not worth it. Therefore, that built-in multiplier explains why rich areas continue to prosper while poor ones find it hard to keep up. Hon. Members from Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and the north of England know what I mean about the difficulty of keeping economies which cannot progress at the same speed within a single currency. *[Interruption.]* If there is divergence within a single currency, economic and political strain is inevitable.

In a recent interview in a British paper, Mr. Pohl said:

"By abolishing the Exchange rate between them, the mechanism that would otherwise have taken the strain has disappeared."

What remains for disadvantaged regions? First, they must lower their wages, but it is impossible to say, "We are taking you into a single currency which means decreasing wages by 20 per cent." That is to ask the impossible. There is no such possibility as devaluation, because the Government do not fix interest rates: Eurofed does. Therefore, we cannot put pressure on wages in that way. There is no alternative to grants from the richer to the poorer areas.

I call in aid, and agree with, the words of the Leader of the Opposition in the exchange rate mechanism debate:

"If the Community seeks to achieve currency union between member states, then whatever the implications for Britain, it will have to make arrangements for joint growth strategies, fiscal co-ordination and regional policies on an unprecedented scale."—[*Official Report*, 23 October 1990; Vol. 178, c. 213.]

Mind you, Madam Deputy Speaker, he said that more in joy than sorrow. Nevertheless, it is true.

The latest estimates of the cost of a single currency for East and West Germany is £40 billion to £50 billion a year for five years. That is the scale of expenditure that we are talking about. Moreover, as hon. Members from the north-east, Scotland and Wales constantly remind us, such grants are not successful. Although they are put into those areas, they do not solve the problem, which is a lack of competitiveness. We will never solve a lack of competitiveness with capital grants.

A single currency leads to discontent, political divisions, and in the end, nationalist parties and break-up. Why else is the Soviet empire disintegrating? It is for one reason, that it has had a single currency for longer than the strains within that empire can accept. Who gains? The poor areas are disadvantaged and the rich areas are bled heavily for the cost of the grants. We are already a net contributor to the Community of £2·2 billion annually. That would increase dramatically.

I conclude that it is not in the interests of any member of the Community to go in for such an idea, certainly not at this time, when the convergence of both the regions within countries and of the nations within the Community is far from any meeting. It is not just that there should be convergence at one point: it is that the convergence should remain as a permanency in the economic relations between states. It is impossible to contemplate that happening for a long time.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that our regional policy is often under pressure from the European Community because, where we describe certain regions as being in economic need, compared with deprived areas in some European countries they are quite prosperous, so a flow of grants would not necessarily come from a central European regional policy?

Mr. Ridley: I have heard regional policy argued over. I have taken part in debates about it in the House over 30 years. There can be no resolution of these problems. Nobody will ever accept that such a policy is right, and it never does the trick, either. It is very much the worst solution to the problem that I have outlined.

All this has nothing to do with inflation. At this point, I pay a warm tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East for his period as Chancellor of the Exchequer. He was one of the best Chancellors of the century. As he said, he not only laid the foundations of our industrial recovery but brought inflation down from 22 to 4 per cent. He made that remarkable achievement with a floating pound. That achievement had nothing to do with the ERM or with being a member of the EMU or a single currency or the gold standard or Bretton Woods or anything else. The only time that we had a dramatic success with inflation was when we were not trying to interfere with the exchange rate.

My right hon. and learned Friend said that he and my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson) wanted to join the ERM much earlier, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Blaby had pre-empted him. He made the pound shadow the deutschmark, thereby creating inflation. I must conclude that inflation is directly related to the control of money supply and is not in any sense connected with exchange rate policy.

In the Community, when one talks to key Europeans, one is told that the question is not whether we should have a single currency but when and how quickly. They tell us that it is inevitable that we will join because Britain always gives way in the end, and that we all have to get quickly on that famous train mentioned by my right hon. and learned Friend.

These people owe us an explanation of what they wish to achieve with a single currency and of how these fundamental defects are to be overcome. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is right to be firm about the single currency. She should, as she does, seek to persuade the other eleven of the mistake that they are making, of the dangers to Europe and to Britain. She is right to offer the hard ecu as a feasible alternative that will test whether the

[Mr. Ridley]

nations of Europe want to go to a single currency, and it leaves the choice to them, rather than pushing an option at them.

There is no middle way. If we do not leave things roughly as they are, there is only the hard ecu or the imposition of a single currency. My right hon. and learned Friend did not tell us what middle way he saw. Therefore, I have to conclude that he does not have a point of difference of substance with the Government. If the House agrees that there will be damaging consequences of joining the economic and monetary union as proposed, it follows that those who proceed will do less well than those who do not. Therefore there is a strong case for persuading them not to proceed with it, but if they insist, there is a much stronger case for us opting out.

Therefore, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is right to pursue the positive priority goals in Europe of widening the Community, succeeding in the GATT Uruguay round, curbing the CAP and opening that protective industry to the world, and completing the single market as soon as possible. I do not think that there is a great difference between my right hon. Friend and my right hon. and learned Friend. I wonder even whether the use of this word "style" which was the other part of the argument, is not some sort of Alan Walters of my right hon. and learned Friend's imagination.

After my resignation, I received an enormous number of letters of support from older people, but curiously also from young people. There was a feeling that we were being pushed along into a single currency, that we were being bullied and that, in the end, we would be forced to join, faute de mieux, because nobody was taking the trouble to stop it.

The country is apprehensive. People want to know more about the matter first, but what they do know, they do not like. They want a firm stand to be taken. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has two audiences for what she says. One is that in the Council of Ministers, the Commission and Brussels, and the other is back in Britain. I think that, as between my right hon. Friend and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East, the country prefers her style.

5.27 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) is the last remnant of the unreconstructed monetarists. His speech was a defence of policies enunciated in 1980. I remind him that the level of inflation of 21·9 per cent. was the level reached after one year of the Tory Government, who had inherited a level of 10·1 per cent. That is the measure of their achievement in those years, which led to a third of the industries in my constituency closing because of the high level of the pound and of interest rates. That was the achievement that the right hon. Gentleman seems to be the only person capable of applauding.

I was particularly interested in, and I welcome, the Chancellor of the Exchequer's comments that he was not going to be sidelined in Europe. That was most fundamental and, whether or not he cleared that with the Prime Minister, it will be important in bringing about the reconciliation with Europe that I hope will now follow as a result of his comments and the comments that we are hearing elsewhere. He said that the hard ecu is gaining ground. I do not see that when I look around. Who will use the hard ecu? The mystery is how it came to be part of the Government's policy and why it is still in play. A further question is what we are trying to achieve with it. Tim Congdon, in today's edition of the *Financial Times*, rubbished it as effectively as any new economic suggestion has ever been rubbished.

I think that the new hard ecu was brought in to confuse the issue. Perhaps it was introduced to receive the plaudits of the Prime Minister in presenting another factor which it was thought might delay matters within the Community. For a time it was successful. For a time there was no reaction from the rest of the Community. Perhaps the other members of the Community were trying to work out all the complications, or perhaps they just dismissed it. Whatever happened at the beginning, it is clear now that it is not a runner. I think that we should cut our losses, forget it and start again.

We have heard that the level of inflation will be the judge and jury of the Government. What is to be the level of inflation? Do we take the retail price index or the underlying rate? My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) explored this issue in a most penetrating way. In effect, the Chancellor of the Exchequer said "That is all finished with now. The underlying rate is not a matter of importance any more. It is the retail price index that matters." Looking at these matters year upon year, we know that, when inflation is rising it is better to choose the underlying rate, and that when it is falling it is best to choose the RPI. It is only sensible of us, the Opposition, to ask why the Chancellor of the Exchequer is not giving the underlying rate. He said that that would involve secrets which he cannot reveal.

That is what used to be said about the RPI. Forecasts were never made of what the RPI would be. Governments never used to give forecasts of unemployment levels. When it comes to such forecasts, of course, they are described as assumptions that are built in. The same could be done with the levels of interest rates. Similarly, an assumption could be made of the underlying rate of RPI. That could be compared in the same way that we can compare the RPI as it is expected to be with what it turns out to be.

The right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury dealt at length with European monetary union and the problems that go with conceding some of our sovereignty and some of our rights. If we could secure a convergence of the various economies, we could have one trading area with the same taxes. We would have to have the same welfare treatment and comparable living standards, employment opportunities and so forth. That, however, is a long way off. We need to consider now whether we should be a part of the discussion. That is the real question before us. When the Chancellor of the Exchequer says that we are not to be sidelined, he is saying precisely what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Monklands, East and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition are saying.

The right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury was right to say that, in past years, there have been transfer payments of billions of pounds to the regions. However, even when the sums transferred were much larger than they are now, they were never enough to meet the need for evening out the great disparities within the country. Scotland and the north, among other regions,

received large payments, but within the United Kingdom there have always been two safety valves. They may not be very good ones, but they have helped to eliminate the damage of real and perceived regional differences.

The first safety valve has been the willingness of our people to see part of their living standards used to help others in different parts of the country. The second safety valve has been the ability of some people to move to more prosperous parts of the country. Getting on one's bike can seriously damage the area that is exporting its best talents and there is serious condemnation of it, but it provides some opportunities in the absence of proper resources being made available to rebuild the economy.

The operation of the two safety valves is much more limited across national frontiers within the Community. The Germans cannot be expected to subsidise those in the south of Italy to anything like the extent that is required. Likewise, Belgium will not transfer resources to our north-east to anything like the extent that a United Kingdom Government would. Nor can people cross language frontiers and expect to be treated much better than guest workers, who have fewer real rights and expectations than the people of the host country.

Regional disparities will not be reduced to anything like the extent that is required because of an inability to alter the exchange rate or to undertake national policies to enable damaged communities to recover. People do not have much sympathy for other people's economic problems. We always think that our neighbour's economy would be easy to run if only all the sensible things available to be implemented were put into effect.

Nicky Kaldor—he was shamefully denied a Nobel prize for economics, a matter which I brought to the attention of the shamefaced head of that organisation on one occasion—advised several new countries on their economies. Tales were told of the implementation of his policies, which were invariably followed by riots. These stories were grossly exaggerated. But in the end, economics is always subject to political judgment. Nicky was right on economics but he did not always understand the politics of the situation.

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): The problem with Nicky Kaldor's prescriptions was not that they were wrong but that Governments did not realise that they were supposed to put his taxes into effect instead of the existing ones and not in addition to them.

Mr. Sheldon: That may have been the case in one instance. More generally, the problem was Nicky's failure to consider the political situation and to understand it. He was always proud of his political expertise, but we know that it was his mastery of economics that was the clue to that giant of a man.

If we do not examine the politics of a country, we shall not succeed with economics. For example, the United States says that the Soviet Union needs to do the obvious thing and increase bread prices threefold. That is its prescription. Meanwhile, the United States cannot bring itself to double its tax on petrol, which would solve its problems at a stroke. The Germans say that we, the British, need more discipline in respect of wages, while they threaten to disrupt the world's trade arrangements by entrenching their grossly indulged farmers within their highly prosperous economy. We like to discipline others in accordance with our own prejudices. Those who have the strongest economies are foremost in their disciplinary zeal.

The Bank of England has a certain amount of autonomy even within the structure of a nationalised industry. Mr. Pohl knows that he would have difficulty in controlling the area of his interest and involvement if he were to have other people in charge. We must ask whether the interest of bankers is the same as the national interest, or even the interest of the Community. Bankers want solid and safe loans and a strong currency, as that gives them scope for financial dealings. It is easier to operate successfully in international markets if there is a strong currency.

Sometimes that may coincide with the national or even the international interest. Everything is seen by bankers, however, in financial terms. In the inter-war years, the role of the Bank of England was considered deplorable, and it was even opposed by Conservative Members. Some Conservative Members even voted for the nationalisation of the bank. Let us not assume that bankers can be operated and even controlled by political forces.

Financial terms are not everything. We want jobs and prosperity for all. Those are not bankers' terms. We want industrial progress. Bankers want that, but only up to a point. As the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, the task of the Bundesbank is to secure a stable rate of inflation, but that is not its only job. Its main job is to look after its own interests. Ours is not to make the world safe for international bankers. Of course, no one doubts that, on crucial issues, Governments will play a part and actually win. They do not do so, however, when it comes to day-to-day operations. The Chancellor of the Exchequer does not see the thousands of banking transactions that are made each day. There is great scope for clearing banks, which have a great deal of power when it comes to important decisions.

I have outlined the problems. We must do what the Chancellor and my right hon. and learned Friend have suggested, and be a part of the discussions and the negotiations. We must not adopt the tone of being superior to the remainder of the Community. Al my arguments and all the arguments of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury are known. We are not the only people in Europe who understand the problems. Other people understand them and are concerned about them.

We are talking about a period years hence, so we do not have to decide every detail now. I am reminded of the story about a couple, one of whom said, "I think that we should get married." The other replied, "Yes, what a good idea." The first one said, "We will have a lovely home." "Yes we will," the other replied. "We will have a couple of children," said the first. "Yes," the other replied. "We will have a boy and a girl, and the girl's name will be Valerie." "No, no, no," said the first, "her name will be Joan." The couple split up.

It is nonsense. Our task is to say, "We are talking about a period long hence; we are not the clever ones and you the foolish ones; we do not have such experience that we can say that we know how to run our economy much better than you know how to run yours. We are all trying to find solutions."

Mr. David Howell: The right hon. Gentleman is speaking with great wisdom, as he often does in economic

[Mr. David Howell]

debates, but is he not unnecessarily complicating the issue of the authority of central banks and their independence of elected Governments? Surely a central bank should look after monetary policy and monetary affairs, as the Bundesbank does, while the elected politicians have the last say on higher matters of state—for example, the unification of Germany. The process must be open and understood. It must be made clear when the interests of monetary stability are put second to other matters. There is no difficulty with that, so I do not understand the right hon. Gentleman's problem.

Mr. Sheldon: The right hon. Gentleman is aware that a number of decisions are made each day in discussions between the Governor of the Bank of England and the Chancellor. He is also aware that the Chancellor is not always successful in those discussions. The Governor has a great deal more detailed day-to-day information at hand. We must not assume objectivity in some of the actions taken by some people. That is the major problem.

Another issue I now wish to raise is the fact that capital allowances are only 25 per cent. With the downturn in investment, especially in manufacturing, it is essential that investment is maintained at as high a level as is reasonably possible. I have said again and again that 25 per cent. is nonsense. If a company buys a piece of machinery for £1,000, at the end of the year it is written down to £750. Very often, that 25 per cent. reduction is less than the commission earned by the person selling that machine. The machine is not worth £750. Far from being an investment incentive, the level of capital allowance is frequently an investment disincentive. I hope that the Government will consider short-term improvements in the capital allowance, as has happened in the past.

With the change in the perceived roles of the Chancellor and the Prime Minister, I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will firmly nail on the head any question of mortgage interest relief being raised above the current level of £30,000. We all know that it is the Prime Minister's dearest wish to have higher and higher levels of mortgage interest relief. We all know that all that does is feed through into the price of houses and so increase the difficulties for those who want to start on the house ownership ladder. The relief is costing £8,000 million a year. It is a waste of money. Instead, we should find some way of putting that £8,000 million into industry, especially manufacturing industry. That is one task that the Chancellor must undertake.

We are approaching the end of our debates on the Gracious Speech. It is not a happy tale. It appears that the balance of payments deficit will continue indefinitely. Despite the many years of benefit from the vast sums of money from North sea oil, despite the many years of the benefit of £5,000 million a year from privatisation, what has been achieved with that enormous amount of income? It has all been a vast disappointment to the country.

5.44 pm

Mr. Michael Grylls (Surrey, North-West): The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) made an interesting and amusing reference to a couple considering their family planning and their dreams about how many children they would have. Of course, I understand his analogy with Europe, but if we spent all our time dreaming about having a family, we would never get around to having one. That is relevant to this debate because people on the continent appear to spend a great deal of time dreaming about what might happen at some time in the future, while forgetting to deal with the problems of today.

British business—the wealth-creating sector of our economy—wants the final, proper and complete establishment of a single market in Europe. That is what is needed and that is what will create greater wealth, but it will not happen if we just dream about the possibility of a common currency. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) dealt with that point extremely well.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor rightly spoke about the prospects for a reduction in inflation under present policies and under the medicine that he is administering to remedy the problems that have hit this country. He is right to suggest that the medicine has bitten hard and that the effects will soon be evident. After all, we have been through this before. At the beginning of the 1980s, the Government had to deal with inflation and there were high interest rates. There was a resurgence of the problem in 1985, and again financial constraints were imposed and inflation brought down. I believe that the same will happen now.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) tried to have some fun with the question whether or not Britain is in a recession. I do not think that it is a matter for fun and he was being silly. He knows —or at least he should know—the correct definition, because my right hon. Friend the Chancellor had to remind him, in answer to his intervention. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman really wanted to be helpful, which he does not, he would admit that the medicine is working and that the economy is slowing down. Everybody knows that that is true. The sooner that that process is completed, the sooner we shall be out of any difficulties.

After 10 years of record growth in the economy, people expect that to continue. They think that there is some sort of magic about it and that, because we have done so well for 10 years, we shall continue to do so and that there will be no decline. I am not making a political point but merely stating what I believe business men and individuals perceive to be the position. They are concerned about what is happening. People have forgotten that life goes in cycles, and that there are economic cycles which do not last for ever. The history books show that. In a way, 10 years of growth is a great record, but sooner or later there had to be a dip. That is exactly what has happened now.

I wish to quote from a report which states:

> "Employment is in steady decline and industrial output is in steady decline. Housing stocks are down by one third. Companies are battening down the hatches. Recession is a fact. People who have lost their jobs have given up hope of finding any new ones."

That is a description not of the British economy, but of the United States economy. Although Britain has been hit by high inflation, the economic cycle does not apply uniquely to Britain. It is happening in all industrialised countries.

The other day I met an old friend with whom I went to school but had not seen for many years. We were reminiscing, as one does on such occasions, and he told me that when he was at school his family was poor because all their money had been lost in the depression of the 1930s. I had not realised that. How easy it would have been after

the stock exchange crash in 1987 for the world to go into a spin similar to the great depression of the 1930s. The reason why it did not was that the economies worked together to ensure that interest rates were cut. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to be critical of those interest rate cuts—there is no point arguing about whether they were right or wrong, because they happened—but it is easy to forget that without them the world economies might have gone into a spin which might have had the tragic consequence of wiping out people's money and jobs on a mass scale, as happened in the 1930s.

Despite the problems that America and Britain are experiencing, Britain, happily, is fortunate in having a basically sound economy. In support of that, I cite the creation of new small businesses—an area in which many people, including myself, have taken an interest over the years. Despite the high interest rate policies since the middle of 1988 to deal with inflation, the net number of new businesses being created has been running at 1,700 per week, which surely proves that, even with high interest rates, the economy is basically strong. It is important to remember that. The economy is strong because it has been growing for most of this year, despite high interest rates.

The economy is fit. It is rather like a horse that is fit and strong but needs to be reined back, and that is what is happening. As we learned from the autumn statement last week, our finances are still in a prudent shape compared with some of our neighbour countries, including the United States with its huge budget deficit. That is a wonderful thing. It is helpful that our public finances are strong. People's disposable income is still rising, unemployment is lower than that of our European competitors and youth employment is half the EC average. Those are all signs of a fundamentally strong economy. Whatever the shadow Chancellor may say, he cannot get away from that. He knows that the British economy is fundamentally strong, finances are strong and the problem of inflation will be resolved.

In addition to the 1,700 new smaller businesses per week being created, there are 70,000 more medium-sized firms than there were a year ago, so I do not take it seriously when business men say that it is difficult to sell or that there is not much of a market today. Not only are there 2 million more people in work, which is a market for goods and services, but there are also all those new firms which did not exist a year ago.

It is said in criticism of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister that she has been abrasive, that she will not go along with the majority in the Community, that if she were a bit more polite she would have more influence in Europe —not that I have ever known her to be impolite—but is it not more sensible to judge by results? When Britain's large budget contributions were being discussed in 1981 and 1984, people said that it was improper to discuss such a measly matter as a budget rebate. But my right hon. Friend succeeded beyond most of our wildest dreams and obtained a rebate of £10 billion. It is extraordinarily churlish of anyone inside or outside the House to criticise someone who has so successfully delivered the goods.

We saw another example of firm negotiation—call it abrasive if you will—in the fact that, 10 days after my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised the matter in Rome, the farm subsidy issue was resolved. It is absurd to accuse her of wrecking the Rome summit. The fact that she raised the GATT talks at the Rome summit must have had an effect because the matter was resolved and we now have the chance to save those all-important talks.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in signing the Anglo-Irish Agreement the Prime Minister showed that she was capable of extreme compromise and also capable of taking bad advice?

Mr. Grylls: You would be critical of me, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I transgressed on to Irish matters in a debate on the economy. I hope that many of the things that I have said about the economy will apply to the important and much-loved Province of Northern Ireland, for which I have a great affection.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been criticised for fighting for British interests. I have just described two matters on which she fought successfully. I would rather put my faith in someone who has fought battles and proved that she can succeed. In the tricky negotiations at the intergovernmental conference next month, so well outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury earlier, and in the future negotiations on monetary union, I would rather put my money on the Prime Minister leading us in the right direction than on anyone else.

5.57 pm

Miss Joan Lestor (Eccles): I have tried to translate some of the phrases used by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and one or two Conservative Members into what is happening in my constituency and others like it. I have listened to phrases such as the strength of the economy, how wages have risen and how the economy has grown, but I have heard little about the effects of what has happened in the past 10 years, about low pay and long-term unemployment, in constituencies such as mine in the north-west where there has been no investment and where traditional industries have declined. I have tried to consider what has been taking place and what that has meant to people, because it is people and how matters affect them that Government policy should be about.

There is one section of society whose interests are not being adequately represented and who are rarely discussed in the House. They do not organise, they do not lobby and they do not have a voice or a vote. They are the children and the young people below voting age. For them, the Chancellor's autumn statement and the Gracious Speech brought no cheer. There were no proposals to tackle child poverty. There was no commitment either to ending the misery of long-term unemployment, which has been a characteristic of my constituency for many years, long before I was returned to the House as its Member of Parliament, when it was represented by Lewis Carter-Jones. There was no promise of the industrial regeneration that it so badly needs to provide jobs now for parents, and the prospect of employment tomorrow for their youngsters.

The Gracious Speech contained no coherent strategy aimed at strengthening the family, whose importance we have heard so much about, to offer employment, and proper child care so that women could be free to work and provide their families with a better quality of life. Instead, we have heard only of proposals to penalise errant fathers in such a way that the main beneficiary will be not their

[Miss Joan Lestor]

children but the Treasury. There are proposals to withhold benefits from mothers who are, for many reasons, unable or unwilling to name the fathers of their children. That is to visit the sins of the fathers upon the children in true Victorian fashion.

Characteristic of many Conservative Members and Government statements is their attitude to one-parent families, because that term is becoming the swear word that "bastard" and "illegitimate" were in my youth. One-parent families are perceived as the cause of so many problems, so they must be punished.

Last week, the Chancellor had the ideal opportunity to put right some of the damage inflicted by the Government on children over the past decade, yet he turned his back on them, and on the poverty in which so many of them are forced to live. The freezing of child benefit for four years and the meagre new £1 payment for the first child reveals the Government's attitude to child poverty.

The Child Poverty Action Group suggests as a definition for poverty, those living on and below the level of supplementary benefit, and those living below 50 per cent. of average income. I commend also the definition in the Church of England's 1985 report, "Faith in the City", which drew widespread comment:

> "Poverty is not only about shortage of money. It is about rights and relationships; about how people are treated and how they regard themselves; about powerlessness, exclusion and loss of dignity. Yet the lack of an adequate income is at its heart."

The Government's refusal to define an official poverty line makes it difficult to arrive at a yardstick. It is yet another manifestation of the Government's reluctance to produce official figures for homeless children, for example —whose numbers are lost in the statistics for homeless households.

I can tell the House what poverty is, because I see it in my own constituency and the surrounding areas. I see it in the people who come to my surgery week after week. Poverty is kids sleeping rough in our cities and begging for money. Poverty is pensioners counting out their last few pence at the supermarket checkout, and having to return something to the shelf because they cannot afford to buy it.

Poverty is a mother with two or three children crowded into one room in a sleazy bed-and-breakfast hotel, or having to use her child benefit to pay the poll tax instead of buying clothes for her kids—because otherwise the bailiffs are likely to arrive. Poverty is children in Conservative Britain having to be kept away from school because they have no shoes. All that after a decade of a so-called economic miracle.

Conservative Members may argue that none of that is true. It may not be true of the children in their constituencies. It is not true of many children. But one must judge the success of any economy and society by conditions at the lowest end of the scale. That is the true test—not how wages have increased for the majority. If Conservative Members are honest with themselves, they will admit that the claims that I make are true in respect of an increasing minority of our children. Not a single agency dealing with children in this country would fail to support my remarks. Those agencies are the source of the statistics that I shall give shortly, not the Labour party.

Since 1979, and the so-called economic miracle, the number of families receiving supplementary benefit has increased by two thirds, despite there being only a small rise in its real value—far behind the increase in real earnings that we heard about today. There is a shocking stagnation in the incomes of the poor. How much longer must they wait for the benefits of the "economic miracle" to trickle down to them? The theory was that if the economy came right, the benefits would trickle down to the poor. That did not happen in America, from which the Government borrowed that theory. The substantial increase in the numbers dependent upon supplementary benefit is a direct consequence of rising unemployment during the 1980s.

It is a shameful indictment of the Government that they are still prepared to countenance one child in 10 living in households in which the head of the family is unemployed. Half a million children have lived with their parents' unemployment for more than two years. I see that in my constituency day in, day out. It is in areas such as mine that one can see poverty, in which people must choose between paying the poll tax and buying their kids a pair of shoes.

What are we to make of the self-styled party of the family, who suggested that fathers should get on their bikes in search of a job, and placed family relationships under intolerable stress as a result of unemployment that was cold-bloodedly engineered by the Government? When I hear people deploring the divorce figures, I think of the constituency that I represented for 17 years until 1983. Unemployment had not at that time hit Slough as it had the north-west. People moving there and elsewhere in the south-east could not afford to buy property even if they had owned a house before, and families were torn apart. Among the most important factors in divorce are poverty and the intolerable strains imposed by separation and the attempt to keep a family together on a meagre income.

In 1987, more than 10 million people—one fifth of the population—lived in poverty. The number of families with income below supplementary benefit level increased by 18 per cent. between 1979 and 1987, to 1·9 million. The bottom line is that more people are on low incomes and making use of the minimum safety net benefit. Among the poorest of the poor are the children of such families.

According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies, in 1987 nearly 2 million families comprising 3 million individuals had incomes below supplementary benefit level. That is an intolerable record of economic mismanagement and moral insensitivity. I never hear debated in the House what unemployment and poverty really mean for families.

There was nothing in the autumn statement for the children of Salford, Eccles and other areas that the so-called economic miracle has passed by. The hon. Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls) spoke of the number of new businesses that have been started, but I should like to know how many folded over the past few years. There has been no new investment in industry, to offer a future for our children. Children and young people are among the worst casualties of the past decade. Many in my own constituency and in others who are now young adults have never worked since leaving school seven or eight years ago. If the Government continue as they have, and given the content of the Gracious Speech and the autumn statement, the brothers and sisters of those youngsters will face exactly the same fate.

6.9 pm

Mr. Norman Tebbit (Chingford): It is always a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Eccles (Miss Lestor), because she always speaks with great sincerity on these matters. However, she should not think, because Conservative Members may take a different view of the way in which those problems are best resolved, that we are less conscious of them. I did not have to wait to become a Member of Parliament for a seat in the north to know about unemployment and poverty.

I especially enjoyed the traditional turn from our resident cheeky chappie, the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), who was on his usual cheeky form. *[Interruption.]* He entertained us with selective economic memoirs. He made a long speech, and if he will contain himself for a moment, and stop talking to his right hon. Friends, I shall continue my speech. The right hon. and learned Gentleman seemed to be completely unable to recollect the name of the only British Chancellor who had to apply for an International Monetary Fund loan. Since he sat down, perhaps he has been able to remember which Chancellor had to go to the IMF. He shakes his head, so I see that he still cannot remember. The name "Healey" clearly escapes him. I think that that is a fair example of selective amnesia.

I should like to deal with other issues, but I think that the phrase which the right hon. and learned Gentleman used today—

"there can be no unity in ambiguity"—

will be today's bon mot and will be hung round his neck for ever more. It may be quoted back at him on many occasions.

There is no doubt that the economy is slowing down quite rapidly. That was my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's intention and he was quite right. The economy had expanded over a long period at a high rate of growth and had finished up by expanding too fast. That was the consequence of excessive monetary growth. *[Interruption.]* I see that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is at it again. He cannot resist talking all the time. If only he said something, it would not be so bad, but he managed to talk today for about 45 minutes without saying a word. I wish that he would shut up for a minute now.

One of the interesting aspects of the current slow-down, recession or whatever one wishes to call it, is that there has been—*[Interruption.]* He is at it again. Some of us realised a long time ago that it is difficult to have one's ears and mouth open at the same time. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has not learnt that.

It is obvious to some of us who are engaged in the world of business rather than merely the world of politics and the weasel words of the law, that there has been a considerable slow-down in the economy, but it has not been uniform. One aspect of the slow-down which has been immediately obvious to those of us who travel around the country is that the recession has hit hardest and earliest in the south-east, in industries such as retailing and distribution. It is the first such slow-down or recession in this country. For a long time, the north and manufacturing were not affected. It is now clear that the slow-down is reaching the north, and it is cutting into manufacturing industry.

I can tell my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench and the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East that a time is coming when present policy should be eased. There is another respect in which this recession is different from some earlier recessions—in the quality of commercial undertakings today compared with 10 or 12 years ago. As the House will know, I am a non-executive director of a number of companies, including British Telecom. The rate of growth in the telecommunications industry has slowed markedly but, none the less, better cost control has meant that profits have increased. That is a safeguard for investment, which is running at twice the level in real terms that it was when the industry was nationalised.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East talked about the poor quality of British firms today. He could travel anywhere in the world and ask about British Telecom's reputation. Every great multinational company in the world would place British Telecom among the top three telecommunications companies in the world. Would they have done so in 1987? Would they hell. That is not an isolated example. All the companies with which I am associated are having difficulties, naturally enough, as the economy slows down, but they all look upon this as a time when they have to cut costs and prune back to become more competitive, knowing full well that it will not be long before the economy is booming again, and they will be in good shape.

The attitude of the management and the work force —I do not like to distinguish between the two, because the work force stretches from the board to the shop floor without distinction, in my view—is totally different now and more realistic than it has ever been. There is no bleak pessimism in any of the businesses with which I am associated.

I must tell my right hon. Friends on the Front Bench that it is clear that tight monetary policy is healing the inflationary wound inflicted by earlier excessively loose monetary policies. For the productive economy, the time is fast approaching when we should ease interest rates and allow growth to resume. It is clear that inflation is on a downward path.

I appreciate that, in the present atmosphere of political uncertainty, it may be difficult for the Chancellor to ease interest rates, since we are locked into the ERM. At some stage, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will be faced with the unpleasant dilemma of whether to hold interest rates higher than would be right for our domestic purposes because of his obligations under ERM. That does not mean that I am necessarily against entry into the ERM, but that "it ain't no free lunch".

Not long ago, Opposition Members saw the ERM as the answer to all our problems—until we joined, when they turned against it, as they always do.

The ERM leads me naturally to the problem of a common or a single currency within the European Community. In the debate on the Queen's Speech this year, I have heard two speeches which I thought were quite remarkable of their kind—another speech was quite remarkable because it was unkind, but that is another matter. The first speech was that of the right hon. Member who was the former leader of one half of the alliance—I do not wish to be objectionable, but I cannot remember his constituency for the moment. [HON. MEMBERS: "Plymouth, Devonport."] Yes, the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Dr. Owen), who spoke on Wednesday. There was scarcely a word that he uttered with which I or my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister

[Mr. Norman Tebbit]

would disagree. There can be no politician more devoted to the European ideal than the right hon. Gentleman—he walked out of the Labour party over it.

Mr. Beith: No.

Mr. Tebbit: That was one of the reasons. Perhaps some of the other reasons were even uglier than the quarrel over that policy. I do his former right hon. Friends the favour of saying that he walked out over policy rather than style.

The second remarkable speech was that made today by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley). He chose to make his resignation speech in a debate in which he could be challenged. There were few who challenged a word of what he said. I only wish that certain Opposition Members, particularly the right hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Stepney (Mr. Shore) had been here. I know, from the way that he nodded during the speech of the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devon (Dr. Owen), that he would have agreed with just about every word that was uttered by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury. That is because these are great issues with which we are dealing.

Perhaps I felt that they were good speeches because I agreed with them. They revolved around issues that I have tried to raise—issues not of sovereignty but of the political rights of the people of this country. That is what we mean by sovereignty. We should do well to use such blunt words. They also revolved around the issues that my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury raised. With merciless logic, he exposed the fact that, if a single currency were to be imposed across Europe, it would necessarily involve huge transfers of wealth from the wealthiest countries to the poorer countries.

"Good," many people might say. However, my conclusion is exactly the same as that of my right hon. Friend: that it would not be long before all the old sores of nationalism were reopened, as the Germans began to say, "This is no good for us. We don't mind our farmers in Bavaria remaining fat on the common agricultural policy, but we're damned if we see why we should be bled white not only by our commitment to sort out socialism in East Germany, among our brothers, but also by having to sort out socialism in Greece and the consequences of socialism elsewhere in the European Community."

The break-up of the Community would be brought about by the refusal of the wealthier countries, as my right hon. Friend said, and as I believe the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) implied, to do that. Although they could stomach substantial transfers of wealth within their own boundaries, they would find it increasingly difficult to stomach them widely across national boundaries. We should be embarking on policies that would inevitably increase, not reduce, nationalism in Europe.

Wearing my business hat, the idea of a common currency—with a strong commitment to maintaining the relative parity of sterling—or of a single currency looks highly attractive, but the former would make less likely and the latter would make impossible devaluations to restore the competitiveness that had been lost by a deterioration in cost control, howsoever brought about. I fancy, therefore, that even some of those in the Confederation of British Industry who are most enthusiastic about such policies might find that their enthusiasm was tempered quite soon after a common currency, let alone a single currency, was imposed.

There are other implications. It is right to raise one of the simple conundrums of a single currency, which is this: where are there two Chancellors per currency, let alone 12? There can be only one Chancellor for a currency. There is one for the dollar, another for the rouble and yet another for the deutschmark. As soon as the deutschmark spread across East Germany, the East German Finance Minister closed the door of his office and went home. There was no place for him.

The case was made—disgracefully, I believe, by Sir Leon Brittan because the case was unworthy of the integrity and intellect of that very considerable politician—that we could get around these difficulties by putting sterling on one side of a piece of paper and the ecu on the other. That was a good enough idea to fool the Leader of the Opposition, but to fool intelligent people one has to go a long way beyond that.

Today, in this kingdom, the Royal Bank of Scotland can print notes with a distinctive motif on them but the currency is sterling and Scotland's Chancellor of the Exchequer is my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major)—no one else. No doubt Sir Leon Brittan and his fellow commissioners would be prepared to allow a Scottish ecu with thistles on one side, a Welsh ecu with leeks on one side and an Irish ecu, which would probably come with the shamrock or the red hand of Ulster, according to taste, on one side. Perhaps there could be English ecu notes with red or white roses on one side, according to taste. However, that would not make four, six or eight Chancellors out of one. There can be only one Chancellor for one currency.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I hate to spoil the right hon. Gentleman's interesting and entertaining analogies, but I ask him to consider the currency of the Republic of Ireland. It was firmly linked to the pound sterling from its inception in 1921 until about 10 years ago. There were two Chancellors for a currency that was firmly linked.

Mr. Tebbit: The hon. Gentleman makes the fatal error of failing to distinguish between what is in effect a common or linked currency and a single currency. Such monetary discipline as there is in the Republic of Ireland is imposed by the need of the Chancellor there to maintain some value for his currency relative to that of sterling. That is the discipline. If people in the Republic of Ireland wanted to renege on the linking of their currency to ours, they would be free to do so. If they wanted to devalue or upvalue their currency, they would be free to do so. The parities between the two have changed from time to time. That is what could happen under the regime of a common currency, such as the hard ecu.

Let me put it again more clearly than perhaps I did earlier to the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East the point about the hard ecu. Yes, if the hard ecu were adopted by our partners, it would accelerate this country towards that rubicon that we should have to cross to reach a single currency. It would have no effect upon that decision, but it would bring that decision closer. That, I believe, is what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer meant.

To return to my analogy of the ecu decorated, according to taste, throughout the European Community, all that decoration would not give back to the people of this kingdom the right that they have today to sack or to elect a Government who are responsible for economic policy. No Government are entirely sovereign over their economic policy, but that is no reason for throwing away what sovereignty we have. It is a great idea to have an independent bank that would be responsible for making sure that the currency was in good shape. I am delighted to know of the trust that Opposition Members put in bankers. They have grown up a lot in recent years.

The Opposition Chief Whip points at those who sit on the Liberal Benches, the implication being that it is not just the Labour party that has grown up in recent years. He has not, however, been listening to what his right hon. and hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench have said. He simply does not understand what they say.

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Tebbit: I hope that my hon. Friend will excuse me from allowing him to intervene. Many other hon. Members wish to speak, and I do not intend to detain the House for much longer.

The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne also made a significant point about the relationship between the German federal authorities and the Bundesbank. He said that, at the end of the day, on big issues, the politicians will have their way over the bank as they did in the reunification issue. That is fine, and I agree with him. That would be so. In that case, when are we going to discuss the democratic institutions that would control the politicians who would have control over the bankers when vital issues are at stake? We need to ask ourselves that question. I do not think that we should allow ourselves too much ambiguity, even in the cause of unity, when we are debating these matters.

I recall that the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East said that the question of a single currency divides my party. I have to admit that there is a good deal of truth in that. It does not divide the Social and Liberal Democratic party. It has only one view and that establishes it for the non-party it is. To have a single view on such an issue can be accomplished only by a party with no more than half a dozen Members. When I asked the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East whether he would be willing to accept a single currency, which by common consent means the end of independent budgetary policy, he took refuge in the unity of ambiguity. I do not know why, because he had even made my point that such a decision would be irrevocable. That is an important step forward. At least the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows the magnitude of the decision that the Leader of the Opposition would take so lightly.

It is long overdue that we should remove the ambiguities that surround these issues, even if it might bring about accord across the Floor of the House between those who take different views within their own parties. There is nothing wrong at times with agreement across the Floor of the House, and there is nothing wrong with an honest acceptance of the fact that, when issues as great as these arise, there can be differences within parties.

I will fight for the whole of my political life to avoid a socialist economic policy being imposed upon the people of this country. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East will struggle against it as best he can, but if he were elected to office, his colleagues would make him eat his words and he would have to impose one. I shall also struggle for the whole of my political life for the right of the British people to have a socialist policy if they want one. I shall fight for them to have a free market, Liberal policy or even a salad policy or a green policy if they so wish.

However, those decisions should be taken in this country by British people. We should not find ourselves in the position where our rates of tax and our budgetary policies are beyond the control of the people of this country. That is the great issue, on which my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, and the right hon. Members for Devonport and for Bethnal Green and Stepney are right.

6.33 pm

Mr. Alan Williams (Swansea, West): The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) started his speech with typical charm but, without being patronising, his speech then became worth listening to. His analysis of the trend of the present recession is faulty. He said that the recession is hitting first in the south of England and has not yet hit as hard in the rest of the country. That is natural when we are dealing with a deflation that is consumer based. It is not generally realised that Oxford street has the retailing turnover of Leeds. Therefore, when the Government decide that to achieve their recessionary impact they will hit consumer spending, inevitably it is the main retailing centres that feel the first blows.

There is nothing novel or different about that. Indeed, even during the problems caused by the oil price increases, the north-east of England retained its employment levels far longer than the rest of the country. That was not because it was healthier but because it had long lead industries such as power plant and so on where existing contracts take time to work through. When the contracts had worked through, the recession hit. When there was an upturn, it was not felt in that area. Therefore, there is no solace for the regions in the pattern that is being followed in this recession. It is a natural consequence of the economic policy that has been adopted by the Government.

Many of us have known the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) for a great many years. Without any hypocrisy, I should say that hon. Members on both sides of the House listened to his speech yesterday with great sympathy, because we understand the humiliations that have been heaped upon him by the Prime Minister. However, it was a limited sense of sympathy because, as a fellow Welshman, my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle), and my hon. Friends who represent the north and Scotland all remember that it was the right hon. and learned Gentleman's 1979 Budget that unleashed the industrial carnage that destroyed one third of the jobs in our manufacturing industry.

When I was at the Department of Trade and Industry, Keith Joseph, now the noble Lord Joseph, and the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East, who then spoke for the Opposition, were the architects of British monetarism. They were the only people foolish enough to absorb the nonsenses of the Chicago school that had been the joke of economists for decades. We were the only

[Mr. Alan Williams]

country to adopt those nonsensical policies. Galbraith thanked heaven that it started in Britain because they then knew that they should not try it in the United States.

The right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East together with Lord Joseph convinced the Prime Minister that she should adopt monetarism. It was a conquest of persuasion over comprehension. In his speech yesterday, the right hon. and learned Gentleman was somewhat selective about history. He said, quite rightly, that he had brought inflation down from 22 per cent. to 4 per cent. However, I remember that he put inflation up to 22 per cent. in the first place. It was his opportunity Budget and his doubling of VAT that led to us having to have high interest rates and high sterling for many years. That made it impossible for us to sell abroad, compete or invest. He was rather like the captain who is claiming credit for getting off the rocks the ship that he put on the rocks in the first place. He tried to ignore the fact that he lost 2 million of his industrial crew along the route and severely damaged the engine room at the same time.

This may be the last year of the Government. What do we find? We have rising unemployment again, inflation is higher than when they came to office and we have a balance of payments crisis. It is a measure of the mess in which we find ourselves that the Chancellor was boasting that the balance of payments deficit next year will be "only" £11 billion. That is the third highest in our history. That is the measure of 11 years of achievement by the Government. All that is left to them and their Thatcherite revolution—the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and others keep returning to it—are claims relating to improving fundamentally Britain's productivity. However, even that was laid to rest on Monday.

There was a fascinating article in *The Guardian* by Victor Keegan, based on a 20-year study by academics at Aston and Leicester It showed that nearly all the productivity gain that is claimed by the Government is actually technological productivity. Before Conservative Members say, "Good, that is what we want," I warn them that it is not necessarily in their favour. Nearly all the productivity that has been gained since the Government came to office is technology-based rather than labour-based. The Government have not produced the enormous turnaround in attitudes and so on that they talk about. That was not the problem. As my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North, with his union background, will no doubt tell the House later, we do not have the back-up in capital, equipment, machinery and labour that our competitors have.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): My right hon. Friend should add that the Government came to office to bring down inflation, and that inflation is now higher than it was in 1979, despite one third of manufacturing industry having been destroyed.

Mr. Williams: It is just one more example of the way in which the Government ignore points that are difficult for them to explain.

Less than 10 per cent. of the increase in productivity has been labour based. The rest has been technology-based. The significant point about why the Government have nothing to boast about is that more than half that increase and improvement took place in the first three years of the decade. It took place despite the fact that investment in manufacturing had fallen 41 per cent. under this Government. As the article points out, they were enjoying the benefits of the record level of investment that they inherited. The article states:

> "But, whatever the reason, the actual rise in labour productivity is pretty small beer . . . compared with the very sharp increases in technological productivity of about 36 per cent. recorded over the decade."

The article goes on to state:

> "Thus, the 10·8 per cent. a year peak increase in technological productivity during the early Thatcher years until 1983 . . . was really caused by the investment boom of the outgoing Labour administration."

That is what we always told them. That is what the industrial strategy was all about—improving productivity and bringing industry up to date. In the early part of the decade, the Government lived on the seedcorn of the 1970s, and in the rest of the decade their economic policy has been kept afloat by North sea oil revenues.

Let us think about what could have happened to our competitiveness, productivity and unit costs if only the Government had sustained investment—£20 billion more would have been invested had they sustained the level that they inherited, and £30 billion more would have been invested, according to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, had they maintained the rate of growth in investment under the Labour Government. The tragedy of this decade —it will probably not be fully realised by the British people for many years—is that we have thrown away the one and only chance in the whole post-war period to have sustained growth. It was the only time when we could look ahead and know that, because of the oil revenues that were to come, we were to be free of the stop-go pressures that were the result of the balance of payments crises that have beset all Governments of both parties in the post-war period.

Despite having a £130 billion cushion against foreign currency pressures of the decade, the Government have still ended up with balance of payments crises and without the break into continuous and sustainable growth that we could have had. We are now back at "stop" yet again. Today, the Chancellor came as near as he is likely to for some time to admitting that the country is now in recession.

We heard yesterday in the resignation speech how, five years ago, the then Chancellor and the then Foreign Secretary threatened resignation unless the Prime Minister gave a nebulous guarantee that, at some time in the future, she would take the country into the ERM. Indeed, some hon. Members might say that perhaps she was at least more faithful to her beliefs over those five years than the then Chancellor and the then Foreign Secretary were. One is bound to ask what has happened. After all, the Chancellor who threatened to resign has already resigned and gone. The then Foreign Secretary who threatened to resign was a trivialised and irrelevant member of her Cabinet.

The pound could not be in a more difficult situation. We have high inflation. What made the Prime Minister say, "Although for five years I have resisted all threats of resignation and all the better opportunities that there have been to go in, I shall now go into the ERM"? There can be only one explanation. It is purely electoral. It is because she sees an electoral benefit which is sufficiently great to overcome the antipathy that enabled her to alienate members of her Cabinet and resist their pressures for all those years.

Why did she do that? With £30 billion of private enterprise hot money—a sort of private enterprise version of the international monetary fund loan—swilling around and that the Government have to keep here, in an election year the Government need the extra shield that the collective reserves of the central banks of Europe will give them to carry them through times of pressure. The crucial point—it is why there is a gap in the autumn statement—is that the key is in interest rates and the need for interest rate cuts.

We had a 1 per cent. cut when the Government entered the ERM. The aim—it is probably unattainable—is to get a total 3 per cent. cut, and more if possible, but 3 per cent. is the probable level between now and the spring. Let us consider what that means in economic and political terms. A 1 per cent. cut in the mortgage interest rate puts £2 billion of spending money in people's pockets—that is after allowing for MIRAS. It represents a £2 billion boost to spending for a Chancellor who is always saying, "But of course we are spending too much." If the Government attain the target of a 3 per cent. interest rate cut—it is the explanation of the gap in the autumn statement—they will release £6 billion of purchasing power into the economy within the next six months, or they will start the process.

Of course, the political impact is somewhat different from a change in income tax. Whereas 21 million people pay income tax, only 9 million people will get the benefit of the mortgage interest rate reduction. For those who have mortgages, the relief will be the equivalent of a 6p in the pound cut in income tax. In the south-east of England, excluding Greater London, because of the average level of mortgage rates there, it will be the equivalent of a 7p cut in income tax. In Greater London, because of the higher level of mortgages, it will be the equivalent of an 8p cut in income tax. That is the gap in the autumn statement and it is the key to the tactic and the argument that persuaded the Prime Minister to go into Europe.

Mr. Tebbit: I must apologise; I was trying to follow the right hon. Gentleman's argument, but my attention lapsed for a moment. I therefore did not hear him say whether he thinks that the Government should have joined the ERM, whether interest rates should be kept high to keep purchasing power out of the hands of people who have mortgages or whether they should be cut. I am a little confused about what he thinks should happen.

Mr. Williams: Of course I want a reduction in interest rates, but a major, national strategic economic decision has been taken not in the national strategic interest but in the short-term electoral interests of the Conservative party. The purpose is to create a window of opportunity——

Mr. Hoyle: A fleeting opportunity

Mr. Williams: That is right. We are not going from stop to go; there will be only a slight selective movement. As I said, because of the way in which mortgages are geared, the major benefit will be felt in the south of England. I do not have to spell out for hon. Members the selective advantage of that for the Conservative party's political interests.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that the disproportionate effect of mortgage tax relief in the south of England will be more than £1,000 million this year, which is more than the entire regional aid budget for the United Kingdom?

Mr. Williams: Ministers and Conservative Members speak of regional policy and of assistance for the regions, but nowhere has had more money pumped into it than the south-east of England. Further, £23 billion has been given to the top 5 per cent. of wage earners, more than half of whom live in the south of England. The amount of regional assistance for Northern Ireland, Wales, the north and Scotland is dwarfed into irrelevance compared with the incredible injection of purchasing power into the south of England. That explains why the property boom began in the south so early and why prices have escalated so rapidly compared with elsewhere in the country, creating not only an income gap but a capital gap between the regions. The gap is widening as a result of taxation policy.

Mr. Ian Bruce *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Williams: The hon. Gentleman will no doubt take part in the debate. I am glad that at least I am keeping him awake.

The ERM has nothing to do with the strategy for national economic recovery but everything to do with the election. When the £6 billion that I mentioned is pumped into the economy, as we have a marginal propensity to import of 36 per cent.—one of the highest levels in the western world—£2 billion will immediately be spent on drawing in extra imports. As mortgage funds feed through into spending power later in the year, the balance of payments deficit, which the Government say is reducing to only the third worst in history, will worsen. By the end of next year and the beginning of 1992, when our unit costs will be higher than those of Europe, when the pound will still be far too high and when our inflation will be higher than that of any of the major industrial EC countries, our balance of payments will become even worse. That is why the Chancellor has concentrated his attention on the third quarter of next year.

We shall then be in a renewed stop, having barely had a period of go. The Government's aim must be to jump during that very short opportunity, because after it has gone we shall be back in a recession from which there will be little hope of recovery. As the Government know, as industry knows and as the right hon. Member for Chingford must know, given his industrial experience, we have joined the ERM at an unsustainable rate of sterling.

6.45 pm

Mr. Ian Bruce (Dorset, South): I am grateful to be called in probably the first economic debate in which I have spoken since becoming a Member, and at a time when much interest is being expressed in our European policies.

I must disagree with hon. Members who have attached such high importance to what is happening with the ERM. Strangely, we seem to be holding a leadership election based on European policy and how people perceive it—there have even been resignations about it—yet we should be concerned about the underlying strength of our economy. When talking about a single currency, one finds that the vast majority not only of the Conservative party but of the Labour party and of our constituents agree with the Prime Minister's policy.

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

One of my local free newspapers, the *Swanage and Wareham Advertiser*—this is probably the first time that it has appeared in *Hansard*—spoke to ordinary people in the street who were Labour or Liberal voters, but it found only one person who disagreed with the Prime Minister's policy. They said all sorts of terrible things about the Prime Minister, but they wholly agreed with her policy to ensure control of our economy.

We are beginning to realise that the ERM is not a panacea but simply a tool, like so many other tools of economic policy, such as linking with the gold standard, or the Bretton Woods system. We have always needed such flexibility in our monetary policy.

In the past five years, there have been enormous changes in the value of sterling. In a difficult market, we have had to ensure that our underlying economy was strong. In the recent past, employment, investment in industry and the improvement in our productivity have been extremely strong. We have done extremely well with our debt repayment, which goes against the trend of almost all other countries, which have financed much of what they have done through deficits. The real wages of poor and rich people alike have been doing extremely well —perhaps too well, given the current level of inflation.

I was interested in the speech of the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), who made an interesting point about the requirements of bankers and politicians. He said that we should not rely solely on monetary policy to overcome difficulties in our underlying economy.

The social charter is far more serious for European policy. Our European partners would like us to agree to a raft of measures that are socialism writ large. It is nonsense for the Labour party to speak of the minimum wage as a percentage of the average wage, because any mathematician knows that, as soon as the minimum wage is made a percentage of the average, the average increases and keeps increasing. The only way of achieving what our European partners want is for everyone to be paid at the highest level.

Leaving aside the mathematical impossibility of the Labour party's suggestion, the minimum wage, as suggested in the social charter, would ratchet up costs within the European Community, which would be bad for Europe, for jobs and for many other matters. It is easy to sell the idea of giving more maternity pay, more sick pay, more time off for training, more this, that and all the other things, but it all ratchets up the cost to our industries.

As a Young Conservative, I remember us Tories talking about the difference between direct and indirect taxes, but that is not something about which we hear much these days. When we came to power, we deliberately put up VAT and increased indirect taxation. Our policy was to reduce direct taxation by bringing down income tax. The ratio between direct and indirect taxes has improved, as we have reduced income tax. However, in some economic respects, we do not have a level playing field with our European partners. In fact, we are tipping the playing field against us in terms of VAT.

VAT in the United Kingdom is probably the lowest in the Community, and that has a strange effect. VAT is imposed on every product when it gets to the shops, whether an import or an export. If there is high taxation through VAT, or any other form of indirect tax, on all products when they get to the shop, imports and home-produced goods are taxed equally. We try to front-end-load the costs of our manufacturers with such things as employers' national insurance contributions which, under the Government of my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Mr. Heath) were 5 to 6 per cent. and then rose to 11 per cent. We have must reduced that slightly, but we have told companies that they will have to pay a greater proportion of sick pay.

We should concentrate on reducing the direct costs that go into the costs of manufacturers and service industries —for example, the rates bill, which has just increased by 10·8 per cent.—and transferring them to the VAT side of the equation. We would thereby reduce the basic costs for our manufacturers and service industries. All the goods and services that are purchased in the United Kingdom would be taxed. That would increase the price of imports. If the basic costs to a home manufacturer were cut, the consumer would pay more or less the same for home-produced goods, even though VAT was added.

Goods exported to France or Germany end up with 25 per cent. VAT, whereas at home the rate was 15 per cent. French companies which import have a lower cost base, because VAT in France is 25 per cent., and only 15 per cent. is levied at this end. A graph wold show that we were tipping the scales against exporters and in favour of importers. Treasury Ministers should consider this point. I have written to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor about it.

From my constituency point of view, we are looking forward to a reduction in defence costs, but that can have severe economic implications. There is a naval base, a Fleet Air Arm base and an Army base in my constituency as well as a body which is involved in military research, and manufacturers which service that industry. It is important for constituencies such as mine that the Government look at the problems of reducing defence expenditure, to ensure that the burden does not fall on one community. The Government should have the overall responsibility to ensure that they do this sensibly. We know that we will have to take cuts and we gladly accept our share, as long as the cuts are spread correctly.

Many people may say that the Queen's Speech referred to few radical measures, but the Government have an enormous job to do in terms of education, with the local management of schools; in ensuring that the right percentage is given to schools rather than held in county halls; and in the national health service in ensuring that the additional money we give is used efficiently. Although the Queen's Speech may be seen as a consolidation measure, firm management of our changes is needed. I believe that we have the right team in Cabinet to see them through. I commend the Queen's Speech.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I remind the House that the 10-minute limit on speeches is now in operation.

7.5 pm

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): The main gap in the Gracious Speech, as identified in the amendment tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends, is in economic policy. It is a damning indictment that we should face this situation

after 11 years of Conservative Government. That is 11 years in which we have had the bonus of North sea oil —a bonus denied to our major competitors—and we have squandered it. Can we imagine what would have happened in Germany or Japan if they had had the benefit that this Government had of revenues of £12·5 billion in the best year? Those Governments would have invested it in industrial regeneration, research and development and training. We have invested it abroad in the economies of our major competitors and have squandered much of the rest of it in completely spurious consumer booms aimed at winning the 1983 and 1987 elections.

Conservative Members have complained that the problem is that the measures we took to avert the major slump after the stock market crash in October 1987 led to the problems we face, but that is nonsense. The measures that were agreed by all the G7 nations were broadly similar, but the same problems do not afflict the economies of our major competitors in the Group of Seven. The problems which we face are the result not of an attempt to avoid that slump but of the Government's short-sighted, profligate and wasteful policies at home.

For all the talk of monetarism, the Government have been prepared massively to inflate the money supply to save their own neck as elections have come along. We now have the most recent gimmick—the idea that, if we join the exchange rate mechanism, this will save us from our problems with the British economy. It is a gimmick, and that is why the market is not supporting the level at which we joined the ERM.

The international financiers who will have to consider what to do with their money know that we entered the ERM at an unrealistically high level, and they are not prepared to prop up the pound at that level. As everyone who looks at the figures knows, they know that, whoever wins the next national election, or the election next week, will have no alternative but to devalue the pound, or we will waste years propping up an unrealistic exchange rate, just as the 1964-70 Wilson Administration did. We must not repeat that mistake.

The real indictment of the Government is that, over their 11 years in office, the percentage of GDP that we export has declined by 3·5 per cent. That may not sound like much, but each percentage point of GDP means £5 billion. Let us compare that record with those of our two most similar European competitors.

Over the same period, France has increased the proportion of its GDP going into exports by 2·5 percentage points, and Germany by eight. It is against that background that we should judge the Government's record. These are reasonably comparable European neighbours who have faced the same broad international circumstances and have had roughly the same opportunities as we have—indeed, our opportunities have been better, given North sea oil, but we have thrown them away.

Now people are jumping up and grasping at the exchange rate mechanism as though it will save us from further difficult problems. Hon. Members on both sides of the House and editorial writers outside it are saying that entry into the ERM will lead to a convergence of our economies: that somehow, by the simple miraculous act of joining the ERM, we can achieve German levels of economic productivity and competitiveness. But that is not what happened to the nations which composed the ERM before we joined it. France, the Low Countries and Germany achieved roughly equivalent increases in productivity in 1962 and 1963 and they stayed broadly close together throughout the succeeding two and a half decades. That allowed them to have an exchange rate mechanism that linked their currencies.

Many people are looking at this the wrong way round —putting the cart before the horse. We must achieve the same increase in productivity in the British economy if we are to sustain any realistic membership of the ERM; otherwise, as regularly as clockwork, we shall have to devalue, and our hold on what remaining markets we have will be continually eroded.

I am not here merely to attack the Government. I believe that we must propose positive alternatives. There is not the slightest doubt that, while we remain in the ERM at this level, we shall not be able to get our economy working properly. We should immediately devalue to about DM2·50. Indeed, I would go further and suggest that we go to DM2·40, so that the pound would be positively undervalued and then tied to the narrow 2·5 per cent band.

That would send the message to all markets that the Government are committed to a massive expansion of our industrial base. It would show that we were putting our industrial economy ahead of our financial and City interests. That basis would give the British economy sustained growth——

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): On what basis does the hon. Gentleman calculate that DM2·50 is just the right rate for the British economy?

Mr. Livingstone: I said that we should undervalue, taking my advice from economists who have calculated that, from the viewpoint of our exports, we should be in the range of DM2·50 to DM2·60. That represents a broad consensus among economists, and in linking such a decision to an immediate cut in interest rates of 2 per cent. we should also take measures similar to ones that have been used in the past, although not the simple reintroduction of exchange controls. I do not believe that they are necessary, but we need to take measures with our domestic financial institutions to slow down the flow of wealth out of Britain and to ensure that, instead of investing abroad, we invest in building our industrial base.

Let us remember that half of all the investment abroad under this regime has been in the economy of the United States of America, one of our major competitors; and the profit that we have received back from that investment has done nothing to help to close the real gap which has opened up in our trade deficit as American workers have got the jobs that British wealth has created. The trade deficit has developed as we have imported what they have made because we are not creating it here.

Moreover, to help the balance of payments deficit, we have had to keep our interest rates high to attract short-term hot money. I challenge Conservative Members to go out and explain that to the people of Britian—that to allow our financial institutions to invest in the economies of our major competitors and create jobs there, we are prepared to keep our interest rates high and hence impose a heavy burden on every mortgage holder in Britain. The people would say that that was mad. If we had followed policies like that in the second world war, it would have been called economic treason and Churchill would have shot whoever did it.

[Mr. Livingstone]

We are in an economic war with our major competitors, and we should put our interests first. The problem is that the Conservative Benches are littered with people who think that we have a special relationship with the United States which overrides our own immediate interests. We subordinate ourselves again and again in domestic, economic and foreign policy to the interests of the United States.

Finally, we should initiate a major cut in defence spending of up to 50 per cent. over five years, thereby releasing wealth for a major programme of investment in industrial regeneration and in training. If we took those measures tomorrow, we should broadcast to the whole world that we intended to end 100 years of relative industrial and economic decline and to commit ourselves to an expanding economy that was capable of sustaining growth and providing the wealth to support the level of social services that the people in this nation have a right to expect. It would be an economy capable of rivalling within a decade the West Germany that is and the united Germany which will rapidly develop.

The debate on the ERM has been unrealistic. In or out of the exchange rate mechanism, in or out of the Common Market, whoever wants to govern Britain well in the 1990s and avoid disastrous increases in unemployment must implement the sort of measures that I have described, which my party has argued for throughout these years that the locusts have eaten, when the best opportunity that the British economy ever had has been squandered.

7.16 pm

Mr. Terence Higgins (Worthing): It is traditional to debate economic affairs on the final day of the series of debates on the Gracious Speech, but that has the disadvantage that the Leader of the House has to deal with a whole range of debates from previous days when he comes to wind up today. I hope that he will pick up just one point in the opening speech by the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, who dealt at great length with the issue of whether we were or were not in a recession—after which he said not a single word about what the Labour party would do to deal with the recession. I hope that my right hon. Friend will pick up on that.

I shall eschew commenting on the autumn statement, because the Treasury and Civil Service Select Committee will be taking evidence on it from officials next week, and then from the Chief Secretary and the Chancellor, and we shall have an opportunity to debate the statement in depth once the Committee has reported to the House.

I shall therefore concentrate on the main thrust of today's argument—the relationship between the economy and Europe. Before doing so, however, I wish to comment on one other aspect of the Queen's Speech. I am delighted that it includes provision for compensating those affected by road programmes, which have long constituted what can only be described as highway robbery. I fear that such compensation will not be able to cover everyone affected by such schemes, especially those off the main routes, but we look forward to seeing the details and I am pleased that we can make some progress. I am also glad that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in his speech last Friday referred to me as advocating this idea.

The question of a single currency has proved to be the touchstone of this debate. It is extraordinary that it should be the centre of our discussions, given that there is no realistic prospect of a single currency being implemented for many years to come. The most bizarre suggestion that I have heard in recent days was the suggestion in *The Economist* that we should have a referendum on the subject. I am and always have been wholly opposed to referendums. I believe that Edmund Burke was right to stress the importance of our representative system of democracy and I have therefore always regarded the idea of a referendum as incompatible with that system.

It would be particularly extraordinary to hold one on this subject, not least because many of our parliamentary colleagues appearing on radio and television recently have failed to distinguish between a common currency and a single currency and have treated them as though they were the same. There is a fundamental difference between a common currency, which runs alongside an existing one, and a single currency which would involve the abolition of all existing EC countries' currencies. If our colleagues are so confused, it is clear that this would not be a good subject for a referendum.

This is a highly technical subject. This afternoon, I was delighted to hear my right hon. Friends the Members for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) and for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) pick up a point that I have been making for some considerable time in debates and at Question Time. They have said that opting for a single currency would mean that we would be giving up for all time the most effective means of adjusting for regional variations in costs and prices. Over a period, for an extended geographical area, that would inevitably lead to high unemployment in some parts of the Community and to the accumulation of financial imbalances between one part of the Community and another.

As I stressed when we originally debated the exchange rate mechanism, the idea that that can be compensated for by financial flows contrasts with our experience, which shows that even within the United Kingdom such transfers are ineffective and do not make up for regional variations. There would be no guarantee that such flows would take place. Together with the sovereignty issue, that is the fundamental objection, which must be brought out as strongly as possible. I am glad that both my right hon. Friends made that point.

In present circumstances, an area about the size of a deutschmark bloc—Germany, France and the Benelux countries—could continue to operate without impossible strains. It is clear, however, that if we extend the area to include Spain, Greece, the United Kingdom and Italy, the strains will be completely intolerable. I hope we can convince our fellow members of the Community of the real risks.

There would be other dangers as well. If we were to implement a single currency over an extended area, it would be far more difficult for countries in eastern Europe such as Hungary and Poland to join as full members. It would tend to make the Community inward-looking rather than outward-looking. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was right to stress the dangers of protectionism and the importance of making the European Community an outward-looking Community instead of an inward-looking one.

The basic manifestation of that inward-lookingness has been the common agricultural policy and the intrinsic

schizophrenia, which has existed in the Community ever since its foundation of a general policy for industry which is in favour of competition and trade across borders and a policy on agriculture which is essentially protectionist. We must stress that point in the discussions.

A great deal of attention has been focused on the remarks of Doctor Pohl, the president of the Bundesbank, for whom I have the greatest respect, particularly at a technical level. He has stressed his objections to the Government's proposal for a hard ecu. They need analysis and I do not agree with them. However, insufficient publicity has been given to the effects that Dr. Pohl believes that the Delors proposals will have. In many ways Dr. Pohl is more opposed to those proposals than to the hard ecu proposals. He is clear that it would be a mistake to rush into the kind of proposals that Mr. Delors has been putting forward.

However, I am a little puzzled by Dr. Pohl's attitude to a European central bank. He seems anxious to design that in the greatest detail, but it seems to have been put into cold storage until it is needed. That is rather uncertain. Dr. Pohl raises all the issues that have been raised by my right hon. and hon. Friends as to who would be accountable for democratic control in such a European central bank. In that regard, it is important that the Government argue those fundamental points in the IGCs. I hope that it will be possible for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, in what will be a very difficult task, to get the support of Spain and Greece for his proposals. A parallel currency would have considerable advantages at the moment.

I am afraid that there is a danger of rushing into a treaty amendment, which would not be acceptable for the reasons that I have given. We would then face the difficulty of deciding whether to use the veto and there might be a danger that some Community members might set up their own arrangements for a single currency. I cannot help but feel that the economic analysis of those issues must lead us to conclude that that would be a mistake. However, the Chancellor will have difficulty persuading those countries, although I am sure that he will carry out his task most effectively. I believe that there is no great division of opinion on the matter on either side of the House. Of course, there are hon. Members at either end of the spectrum, but the vast majority of hon. Members are not in favour of a rush towards a single currency or stages 2 and 3 of the Delors proposals. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will bear that in mind.

The Community must concentrate on the other difficult issues, not least the problems with agriculture. The Commission's proposal in the Uruguay round is inadequate. We should not simply be pressing for a 30 per cent. reduction in agriculture subsidies. We must recognise that there should be urgent reforms. Measures for economic integration should be worked for steadily, but they must rely on greater convergence of the economies. That must come first, rather than our seeking to establish a single currency which would inevitably create quite intolerable strains.

7.26 pm

Mr. Jack Thompson (Wansbeck): I have listened carefully to nearly all the speeches that have been made today. Hon. Members referred to the broad brush situation of our economy and I found it intriguing that the speeches today have been dominated by our relationship with Europe. That is all very well, but we must remember that other elements of the economy must be considered. I make no apology for referring to the position in my region. I am the secretary of the northern group of Labour Members and I have a great interest in my part of the country. I am sorry that the Chancellor has just left the Chamber. If he had spent more time visiting the north of England, he would have discovered that the recession has existed there in various stages for 10 years. In fact, we have never really been out of a recession.

It is often repeated that this nation's chief economic resource is its people and that the maintenance and improvement of material, intellectual and environmental living standards depend upon the people's skills, knowledge, ingenuity and application. A further powerful influence are Government policies, which in the past 10 years have done little to enhance those attributes in the northern region of England. In fact, the vast reservoir of skills and talents has been deliberately stifled and wasted in terms of the uncontrolled destruction of the region's traditional industries, causing thousands of highly skilled personnel in the shipbuilding, engineering and mining industries to lose their jobs and future prospects of employment for their children.

Even if the argument is accepted that the old industries had to decline—and that is an argument in its own right—a huge pool of skilled workers were left with no future and many of them still languish on the banks of the Tyne and Wear, in Cumbria, Cleveland, Durham and Northumberland. They suffer when a planned change in the industrial base of the region could have harnessed their talents without the traumatic events of the past few years. Those people are not the sort to adapt easily to working in the tourist or service industries. Their backgrounds and traditions preclude that. Their skills, knowledge, ingenuity and application have been wasted in the pursuit of free market dogma and can never be replaced by the pseudo, superficial training schemes which have been introduced, revised, revised again and are still found wanting.

The issue of closer links with the EEC greatly concerns many who have an interest in the economic advancement of the northern region. Increasing numbers of people feel that the only genuine support that the region will get is from the Community, because it is clear that the Community is far more sensitive to the problems of peripheral regions than the present Government are. Those people do not see EEC support as a handout but rather as a return on investment. The Government do not recognise that, being notable in their reluctance fully to adopt the principle of additionality.

Many of my constituents and others in the northern region are not particularly concerned about a single European currency. They tend to think in terms of what is happening in the region. We have a substantial amount of Japanese industry, some German-based industry and some Canadian-based industry. My constituents recognise the value of the Canadian dollar, the yen and the deutschmark as being every bit as important as the value of the British pound.

The approach of the single European market is of great concern in the region. Due to the Government's lack of interest in regional regeneration, we lag far behind in communications, especially road systems north of Newcastle and west to Carlisle. They are vital links in developing the region. We lack skills training for our young people and need more modern plant. All those

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factors add to our problems, which the Government could have helped us to overcome. We are not inspired by the advent of the channel tunnel without proper links to the north. The northern region could cope with those changes if it were allowed to compete at the same level as other regions. We do not ask for privileges—only fair treatment.

Equality of opportunity was evident in the 1960s and 1970s, when industries were specifically encouraged to establish in the region. Examples in my constituency are Alcan Aluminium, Glaxo, Searle and a number of others. Boots, Merck Sharpe and Dohme, and Bristol Myers are in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell). All those industries responded to the opportunities made available to them, mainly by the Labour Government, and they continue to survive despite the pressure of high interest rates, inflation and the unified business rate. The only real efforts being made to regenerate the region are coming from two organisations—the Northern Development Company and the Northern Region Councils Association, both of which are doing splendid work on behalf of the region with only minimal Government support for the NDC.

There is urgent need for a proper regional dimension in Government policy. I fully support the Labour party's proposals to introduce a form of regional structure, decentralising some of the Government's inward-looking services and allowing more scope for local input and decision making. There are too many decision makers cocooned in Whitehall and Westminster, unaware of the real situation in the far-flung reaches of the Thatcher empire. Flying visits by Ministers of a half or one day's duration do nothing to inspire confidence in remote decision making.

In a recent report in the Newcastle *Evening Chronicle*, Mr. Paul Briggs, chairman of the Northern Confederation of British Industry, said:

"As a nation we need to force-feed investment. This is not whingeing and whining—this is reality. Time is not on our side and we cannot achieve increased productivity, lower unit costs and consistently low unemployment without the equipment to make it possible. Investment in manufacturing industry had a very small share of the national investment and without it—we cannot keep up with our overseas competitors."

I agree entirely with those sentiments because he, at least, is a man who lives with the problems and knows some of the answers to them.

7.33 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Cannock and Burntwood): Anybody watching our proceedings on television, as many seem to do nowadays, cannot fail to be impressed by the contrast between the speech of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the entertaining speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). My right hon. Friend was right to suggest that the speech from the Opposition Front Bench was incredibly shallow. If it revealed anything, it was that, as far as we could determine the Opposition's policy on Europe, it was identical to that of the Government.

I, too, welcome the Gracious Speech, not least because we are promised a Session of rather less frenetic activity than we have been accustomed to in recent years. It will not do hon. Members any harm to get home to their wives at a more civilised hour.

It is a great privilege to serve in this Parliament and it has been a privilege to serve throughout the past two Parliaments, especially under the leadership of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. She has unquestionably brought about an enormous resurgence in Great Britain's standing throughout the world. Wherever one goes now Britain is a respected country. Indeed, even where people do not know the name of our country, they know the name of our Prime Minister. That high standing has been transferred to the United Kingdom economy where welcome and dramatic changes have taken place.

The hon. Member for Wansbeck (Mr. Thompson) mentioned foreign investment in the United Kingdom. He answered his hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone), who complained that United Kingdom profits were invested overseas. The hon. Member for Wansbeck has demonstrated that investment is a two-way process. Thanks to the liberal trading climate that we have created in the United Kingdom, foreign investors want to invest here alongside British investors.

We have seen a massive 50 per cent. increase in productivity over the past 11 years, record growth in the past eight years, strikes becoming less and less frequent, a low taxation regime and, the greatest achievement of all, balanced budgets. Those are sound, solid achievements, on which this Queen's Speech builds.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins), I welcome the proposal for compensation for compulsory purchase. That will go a long way towards ensuring that the infrastructure projects that we need are unlocked rather more quickly than they are at present.

The Opposition have no constructive policies to offer. As time goes on, more and more of our people will take things for granted as their unhappy experience of socialism in the United Kingdom fades into the distance.

Privatisation has been one of the great jewels in the crown of successive Conservative Governments since 1979. It has been a spectacularly successful policy. It is worth reminding the British people, our electorate, of the four principal benefits that it has brought. First, it has released the flair and enterprise of managers and people working in industry. Secondly, it has given people a stake in the business for which they work. They now have more commitment and reason for commitment. Thirdly, it has released those industries from Treasury control. Now they can invest funds in much needed investment when they believe that it is right and not have to take their place in the queue as the Treasury thinks fit, competing with other political priorities. Fourthly, it has brought better service to customers, which is most important. Fifthly and incidentally, it has raised about £28,000 million for the Exchequer, but that is only a happy by-product.

Privatisation has been most successful where we have introduced competition. There has been competition in the airline industry and it is no accident that British Airways is the world's favourite airline. It has been transformed beyond all recognition from the days when it was in the public sector.

Mr. Salmond: What does the hon. Gentleman think of competition in the privatised steel industry?

Mr. Howarth: Wherever there is competition, it is good for consumers, whether private individuals or corporations.

We have seen enormous changes in British Telecom. It has been transformed from a moribund industry where there was no choice, into an industry that is successful and meets the demands of customers. It is now possible to buy a telephone for less than £20. Under the socialists we had no choice—just what was on offer. The investment has taken place at a rate of £3,000 million in the latest year, in addition to a total investment of £40,500 million. That shows that the private sector invests in technology for the benefit of consumers when it can make profits and run its own affairs. We were told it would not be interested in the consumer or in public service, but not only do 96 per cent. of payphones work, but whereas in 1984 there were only 77,000 payphones, today there are 95,000. Mercury is providing real competition, and I look forward to Friday when I shall be opening a new Mercury payphone in my constituency.

The success of the denationalised industries is shown by the transformation in their finances. Whereas, in 1978-79, those industries that have since been privatised received Government subsidies of £19 million, excluding capital grant and public dividend capital, in 1989-90, those same companies contributed no less than £1,500 million to the Exchequer in corporation tax. That is a demonstration of the success of privatisation. Those companies have been turned round in an exciting development.

Other countries have followed our example. Recently, Argentina privatised its telephone service. Even the Opposition are paying lip service to competition, although I thought that it was rich for their spokesman to say yesterday, "While we welcome competition . . . " Every time that the Government have introduced competition, the Opposition have opposed it root and branch. They do not like the consumer having choice. The British people will not trust a party that pays lip service to the ideas that we established and carried to fruition.

We have a great deal further to go, but we are making progress. We have introduced choice in education. Local management of schools is proving to be a great success. Our proposals on health are going through. I am pleased that privatisation will feature in this legislative Session.

These are not the easiest of times for the Conservative party. Inflation is the litmus test by which we judge ourselves, and there is no doubt that we have not been as successful at containing inflation as we should have been. However, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe)—I am sorry that he is not here now—was wrong to suggest that, had we joined the ERM five years ago, we should have been able to contain inflation. There is no evidence to sustain that argument, and my right hon. Friends the Members for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) and for Worthing (Mr. Higgins) have demonstrated without any doubt that fixed exchange rates offer no solution to the problems of the United Kingdom.

When my right hon and learned Friend was Chancellor of the Exchequer, he distinguished himself by being the Chancellor of floating exchange rates. We should have kept to that policy, for in that lay a mechanism by which the strains and imbalances of trading patterns could be taken care of by the marketplace rather than politicians. It was ridiculous of the hon. Member for Brent, East to suggest that DM2·50 is the rate at which the pound should be linked to the deutschmark. He has no idea what the right rate is, and nor does anybody else. It should be left to the markets to determine. Fixed exchange rates will inevitably lead to centralised monetary and economic control and my belief is that that will lead to severe and dangerous tension throughout Europe.

While I welcome much in the Queen's Speech, there is one omission. The hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes) will agree that it is a shame that there is no Bill on coal-mining subsidence. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will be able to devote time to ensuring that that will come before the House during this Session.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The winding-up speeches are expected to begin at 9.10 pm. Six hon. Members wish to speak in the debate. If my mathematics is correct, that means that I can somewhat relax the 10-minute limit on speeches, but were any hon. Member to abuse that, I should have no hesitation in putting on the clamps again.

7.44 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I shall concentrate in today's debate on the economy on the Scottish steel industry, but I shall first pick up on four speeches. First, I listened with some interest to the right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit), who made a plea for self-determination, control and the ability to sack Governments and Chancellors. I wish that he had extended that important right to the nation of Scotland, which has been trying to sack this Government and successive Tory Chancellors over the past 10 years.

I suspect that the major difference between the right hon. Gentleman and me on Europe, and the reason why I am friendly to the developments taking place in the European Community and he is so hostile to them is that we in Scotland are starting from zero self-government, zero control and zero self-determination. Therefore, any improvement on our position, or the raising of our status to that of other member states over the next few years, will be a major achievement for Scotland.

I also listened with interest to the speech of the right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) and to his appeal to hon. Members representing constituencies in Northern Ireland, the north of England and Scotland to show their support of his view that those areas have been disadvantaged within the monentary union of the United Kingdom. The hon. Member's economic views are probably as popular with the people of Northern Ireland, Scotland and the north of England as are his political views with the Germans, the French and the Irish. His views would have a great deal more credibility were it not for the fact that, as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, he presided over the demolition of regional policy in the United Kingdom. Someone from his background does not have the right to lecture other Europeans on whether they would be prepared to make a fiscal contribution to offset the disadvantages of monetary union to areas of low productivity.

Such a policy could be introduced. We could, for example, have surrogate devaluations, such as labour subsidies, in the community. There are many debates in Europe on how such fiscal assistance could be introduced in the monetary union of the Community. I should be more confident of the interest and ability of other

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Europeans to take part in such a policy than I would ever be of the right hon. Member's wish to do so, given his track record on regional policy.

I listened with interest to the Prime Minister's speech, and I re-read it last night to remind myself of what the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown) called a "chilling" passage on the Gulf. I was concerned by the circumstances in which that passage arose. The deputy Prime Minister had resigned, her leading political rival was poised to strike and she was expecting an assault from the Leader of the Opposition. She was not to know that her position would be strengthened by the time that he sat down! Her speech was calculated. That passage seemed to me to be designed to divert attention from domestic political difficulties in much the same way as the American President used sabre rattling on the Gulf to divert attention from his domestic problems two weeks ago.

I cannot see the point in sabre rattling on the Gulf. A dictator like Saddam Hussein will not meekly withdraw from Kuwait, because the loss of face involved would lead inevitably to the demise of his regime. It does not seem that the western world is prepared to offer him the golden bridge of diplomacy, which would allow a peaceful settlement to be negotiated. The consequences of a war in the Gulf are becoming all the more clear, and may include 100,000 dead and substantial if not gigantic environmental and economic damage to the international community.

The only real option in the Gulf is the determined application of sanctions to get hold of the windpipe of the Iraqi economy, to keep hold of it and gradually increase pressure until internal dissent brings about the demise of the Iraqi regime. Such a policy demands patience, real guts and determination, rather than the saloon-bar patriotism offered by the Prime Minister last week.

The Prime Minister's political difficulties are substantially greater than they were at this time last week. I hope that, in the midst of the Tory party's internal election battles over the next four days or so, we do not see the Gulf card played once again as a diversion from domestic political difficulties.

I found it interesting that the Leader of the Opposition managed to achieve the not inconsiderable performance of delivering a speech in which he did not lay a glove on the Prime Minister, never mind a knockout blow. I re-read it carefully last night to try to ascertain whether that was part of a grand strategy or merely natural ability. I have no doubt that, while natural ability comes into it, the right hon. Gentleman's speech was designed to ease the pressure on the Prime Minister. Indeed, it was designed to put no pressure upon her. If the Conservative party wants once again to alter the rules of its internal election contests, I suggest that it extends the franchise to the Labour Front Bench, where it will find some of the few remaining Members of this place who are extremely anxious to keep the Prime Minister in office.

If it is true, as I understand the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson) wrote in the *West Highland Free Press* only last week, that the Labour party calculated their interest to be in the retention in office of the present Prime Minister, I suggest that it tries to keep that quiet, safely away from the notice of the electors of Paisley, Renfrew and Johnston over the next two weeks.

I shall say a few words about the Scottish steel industry. The hot strip mill at Ravenscraig is under a death sentence from British Steel, despite its high productivity. The Clydesdale seamless tube works is also under a death sentence, despite the fact that a modest investment could make the works competitive in the one major steel market in Europe which is expanding. The Dalzell plate mill still awaits a decision in respect of a single plate mill strategy. It is still anxiously wondering whether it is to be the chosen plant, despite the fact that a Glasgow university study showed clearly that the cost of concentrating on Dalzell would be about £125 million, while the cost of the green-field site option would be £425 million.

First, I should like to hear a firm commitment from the Opposition Front Bench on the position of Dalzell within the single plate-mill strategy. I should like the Labour party unambiguously to back Dalzell as the best option for such a strategy. Secondly, I should like to hear from Conservative Members at least—the hon. Member for Cannock and Burntwood (Mr. Howarth) made a plea earlier about competition in markets—that they are prepared to support a reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, or, even better, to the European Commission, designed to examine the exploitation of the monopoly in domestic steel production in which British Steel is undoubtedly engaged.

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is aware that the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, of which I am a member, took the right decision today to examine the position at Ravenscraig. We know how essential it is for Scotland and the entire British economy. I think that we shall all join the hon. Gentleman in doing our best to save the steel industry in Scotland for the nation.

Mr. Salmond: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I welcome the decision of the Select Committee. I hope that it will extend the terms of reference of the inquiry to include the Dalzell plant. I hope also that it will examine the network of deals in which British Steel has engaged across Europe to carve up markets and restrict competition. That is the folly of privatising as a monopoly, and that applies certainly to British Steel.

Thirdly, I should like to hear some commitment from the Labour party on public ownership. It seems to me and to many others in Scotland that, if the Opposition parties are to have any influence on the actions of the board of British Steel, we need to convince Sir Robert Scholey and the other members of the board that, unless he changes course and stays the hand of the executioner over the Scottish steel industry, there will be a day of reckoning. If he and his board are engaged in an act of industrial vandalism—that is the only possible description of the rundown of the Scottish steel industry—such a strategic industry cannot be left to the likes of them. The Opposition parties should say clearly that, if British Steel continues on its present course, it will be a candidate for public ownership. That is something that the Opposition parties could do now that might have an immediate influence on British Steel's decision making for Scottish plants.

I believe that the Labour party is not making that demand and not engaging in that sort of rhetoric because it is frightened of the concept of public ownership. It is not now "respectable" to sell public ownership south of

Birmingham, to that part of the electorate on whom it has targeted so many of its political efforts. About 20,000 jobs are linked to the Scottish steel industry, either directly or within the plants of immediate suppliers. If we include industries which depend on the sourcing points for steel that would be affected by price increases if the steel industry in Scotland were run down, perhaps as many as 100,000 jobs in Scotland would be touched in one way or another by closures and the demise of the Scottish steel industry.

What country in history has discovered oil and ended up poorer but Scotland? What country in Europe would be running down its indigenous steel industry in the face of the large and expanding North sea market but Scotland? What country but Scotland has had to endure the level of economic incompetence that has been imposed upon it by a succession of United Kingdom Chancellors of the Exchequer?

7.58 pm

Sir William Clark (Croydon, South): I welcome the Gracious Speech. My only regret is the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe). I found it disappointing and, in some sections, unfair.

I welcome especially the items in the Gracious Speech that are related to transport, whether they be planning applications or increased investment in our transport system. I welcome also the privatisation of the Export Credits Guarantee Department, the insurance department for exports.

The Gracious Speech is tied up with the autumn statement. It is right to put on record again the congratulations of my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself on the achievements of my right hon. Friends the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Week after week and month after month, we suffered rumours about what was happening in the economy. These originated from the media and the pundits. The House will recollect that the overshoot of public expenditure for next year was said to be about £12 billion. In fact, the public expenditure increase will be increased by about £8 billion. The media and the pundits were about £4 billion out on that score alone.

If we discount the reverse element within public expenditure of £3·5 billion, the increase in public expenditure for next year has been contained to £4·5 billion. The Government's commitments to pensions, welfare payments and the rest of it will all be honoured. Many local authorities—mainly those which are Labour controlled—have overspent, and the Government's control of public expenditure is a remarkable performance.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer rightly castigated the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer, for not once mentioning any of the achievements of the Conservative Government in terms of the economy since 1979. I know that Opposition Members do not like good news. They should stop talking down the economy. We have more people in work today than in 1979. I accept that inflation is high, but it has come down from 26 per cent.——

Mr. Bruce Grocott (The Wrekin): When was that?

Sir William Clark: It was 22 per cent., and rising rapidly, when we took office.

Our exports have risen since 1979. In addition, our net overseas assets, as a percentage of gross domestic product, are the largest of any major industrialised country. Another important point is that all the doom and gloom about new businesses in fact relate to those that fail. Currently, the net increase in new businesses—those that are set up minus those that fail—is 1,300 per week. That is not a bad record. Of course, there are many fewer strikes now.

There has been a transformation in our economy, to which the Opposition should at some point pay tribute. The national debt next year will be reduced by £29 billion. I remind Opposition Members that that is equivalent to 12p in the pound at the standard tax rate. The interest on that sum would be about 1·5 to 2p on the standard rate each year, so it is a considerable achievement.

There has been a great deal of talk about the exchange rate mechanism, which Britain has entered with a 6 per cent. margin either way and at a deutschmark rate of 2·95. Some people have questioned whether that was the right rate at which to enter, but hon. Members should remember that Britain will eventually move to a 2 per cent. margin either way. If at that time it is felt that the 2·95 rate is too high, it can be adjusted.

I am convinced that the hard ecu should not be written off. The bond issues in the ecu market on the London international financial futures exchange are growing. That currency is being used for bond issues. In March next year, the exchange intends to introduce a futures market in the ecu. We should not set any time limit, but rather wait to see what evolves from that. In five or 10 years—who knows?—the hard ecu may be acceptable. In the meantime, we could have a parallel currency with a European monetary fund.

In each of our economic debates, the Opposition are asked what they would spend in Government, and how much it would cost. We never have an answer. They promise increases in pensions and in spending on the national health service and on education. Whatever one cares to name, they promise to provide it. They say that they have not costed their proposals, but I can help them, as Liverpool university has costed all their promises——

Mr. Grocott: Oh?

Sir William Clark: If the hon. Gentleman does not believe me, I can send him a copy of Professor Patrick Minford's report. He has costed the Opposition's proposals at £22 billion—*[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members do not accept that figure, they should tell us their figure. I am prepared to accept Liverpool university's estimate.

I remind Opposition Members of what that would mean for taxpayers. A Labour Government would have to find that money and they could do it through an increase in the standard rate of tax from 25p to 35p. That would produce £20 billion. As the higher rate taxpayer would also have his rate increased, that would produce a little extra revenue. If the Labour party does not want to do that, it could raise value added tax by 10 per cent., which would produce just over £20 billion. I am convinced that the general public are entitled to know how much all the glowing promises from various Opposition spokesmen will

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cost the taxpayer—*[Interruption.]* If Opposition Members do not agree with the Liverpool university figure, they must tell us their figures.

I accept that the medicine of high interest rates is unpalatable and unpleasant, but it is worth it because the economy has slowed. However, I agree with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor that it will pick up next year. We must be realistic and pragmatic and take various factors into account—the Gulf, the United States economy, and so on. I accept that we are in rough seas, but we have been there before and we have come through.

We have achieved a tremendous amount. We have achieved a strong economy, and we must not deny that or talk it down. We must continue with the present policies. We do not want any U-turns. I am convinced that we shall come through and that Britain will return to prosperity. That is why I welcome the Gracious Speech.

8.8 pm

Mr. Doug Hoyle (Warrington, North): If ever there was typical complacency, it was the speech of the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Sir W. Clark). Indeed, there has been a series of complacent speeches by Conservative Members, from the Chancellor onwards. At least the Chancellor admitted that Britain is in a recession. Of course, we are not simply in a recession—we are in a deep recession. All that the hon. Member for Croydon, South could talk about was Labour party promises—not what the Government will do to remedy the mess into which they have got this country.

The Government are inept. There has been a high degree of economic mismanagement. They have had £91 billion in oil revenues—they have been positively awash with oil—since they took office in 1979, but we have little to show for it.

It is not much good Conservative Members talking about the new companies that have been created when there were 16,500 bankruptcies in the first nine months of this year and 64 per cent. more liquidations in the third quarter of this year than there were in the same period last year. That is not a record of success—it is a record of failure.

Building employers tell us that there will be 50,000 redundancies this year in the construction industry and a further 50,000 redundancies next year. In the real world in which many of us live, unemployment is increasing. When we talk about unemployment we must remember the misery that it brings not only to those who are unemployed but to their families, who suffer falling living standards, bills that cannot be met and the difficulties of paying for a roof over their heads. That is the real world under this Government after 11 years in office.

Anyone who doubts what is happening has only to consider the Government's unpopularity as shown in the two recent by-elections. That unpopularity has caused such a flurry in the dovecotes that Conservatives no longer know whether they want the Prime Minister.

At long last, whether they like it or not, the Government have had to join the European exchange rate. One can argue about whether DM2·95 to the pound is the right rate. The truth is that it is too high for British industry and British industry is uncompetitive, which means that more firms will go bankrupt, there will be more liquidations and more unemployment. That is the real tragedy of what is occurring.

The Prime Minister is now against EMU. She huffs and puffs like the big bad wolf at the wall, but it was she who erected that wall when she agreed to the single European market, when she took us into the ERM. She is well on the way, whether she likes it or not, and she is the person who is responsible. The Prime Minister may say that she will not accept something, but she always does in the end. That is the tragedy of the record of the Prime Minister and her party on Europe. As a result of that attitude, we are always responding to rather than shaping events.

Next we will have a European bank under the control of bankers rather than under political control. What we should be arguing for in Europe is for more regional aid and for regional policies as outlined by Labour Members. Nor, despite the crisis in British industry, is anything being done to bring about the necessary investment. Investment in industry is already lagging far behind that of our competitors, which means that we shall fall even further behind. We all know that the present situation in Britain means that investment in industry will be cut yet more, making our industry even more uncompetitive.

Labour Members also stress the importance of training, but rather than increasing training the Government will be cutting spending on training by £1 billion in real terms by 1993-94. Here again, we are falling behind our competitors —we do not have the highly mobile, highly trained work force that they have, and that augurs ill for the future.

I realise that there is a crisis of confidence in the Conservative party. There is a little local difficulty. We hear from the Prime Minister that she will not duck the bouncers, that she will not stonewall, that she will knock the bowling all over the field. As a keen student of cricket, I can tell her that the person who plays that kind of game may succeed but may also be bowled first ball. If she does not believe me, let her ask Ian Botham. She may well be bowled first ball in the election that is to take place—I do not know—but I do know that it is not the Prime Minister alone who is responsible. The Cabinet must share responsibility for the situation in which we find ourselves. Whoever is elected will also have to bear responsibility for 11 wasted years. Despite the benefits that should have accrued from oil revenues, we are not in a good position to face competition.

What we need is not a private cricket match but a cricket match in which all can join. We need a general election with a new captain, a new team and a new start. We need a team that believes in industry and in revitalising manufacturing industry so as to create the wealth to pay for our social programme, for education and for a better health service. That is what we need, but without competitive industry we shall not be in that league.

For 11 years there has been a concentration on service industries, but because of our handling of European matters we are in danger not only of losing out on the European bank—the City of London may also lose out and the centre of finance may move from here to Paris or, more likely, Frankfurt. Whether we like it or not, in or out of the Common Market, we are affected by what happens to the deutschmark. We cannot get away from that. The Government cannot lead us forward, nor can we recover from the economic mess in which we find ourselves

without a new approach and a new team who will put money into industry and training and prepare us to meet the challenges of the 1990s.

8.17 pm

Mr. David Howell (Guildford): With some exceptions, this has been a rather enjoyable debate, contrary to the expectations of some of us, certainly on the Conservative Benches. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) was in cracking form when he spoke earlier, but his view that Chancellors should be the sole controllers, and could be the sole controllers, of modern economies was a bit romantic.

It is risky to hold such a view because that devalues the role of the other authority in any modern economy, whether a large continental one or a national one, and that is the role of the central bank and its governor—the central monetary authority. Therefore, I am concerned when I hear hon. Members talk as if there were some magic world to which we could somehow return in which all the economic factors of our nation could be controlled by the politicians, the Minister of Finance or, in our case, the Chancellor.

I go further and say that if there is one overriding and burning need in Britain in order that we may perform more effectively and have a sounder monetary policy and be better members, or effective members, of the ERM, it is that we should somehow achieve a less politicised monetary policy. It is the countries that can run a depoliticised monetary policy, with perfectly sensible and democratically controlled fiscal policies and broad national policy, which have been most successful in getting their currencies to perform and whose currencies are most respected, traded and sought in world currency markets.

Whether we are in the ERM or not, and on the whole it adds some reinforcement, it is no substitute for the fundamental need for Britain to secure and run a sound monetary policy. When world markets look in on this country and see that, however determined are our political leaders, they are still the people who pull the precise levers of monetary policy—short-term interest rates—those markets are bound to attach less credibility to such decisions than if we had a separate, more independent monetary authority.

There can never be a completely independent authority, because a subtle nexus of relationships must exist between central bank governors and any democratically elected Government. However, unless we can establish greater separation of the powers of our central monetary authorities in operating monetary policy, and remove from the shoulders of my right hon. Friends the burden of carrying the political responsibility for setting and changing short-term interest rates, we shall not succeed in establishing credibility for our currency and thus the lower interest rates at which it can be traded in a stable way that we really deserve. That touches on a fundamental misunderstanding that I believe that I saw reflected in some of the notions of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford, much as I agreed with many of his other remarks and enjoyed his speech.

However, the real muddle in this afternoon's debate was to be found not in the remarks of my right hon. Friend but in those of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith). I do not deny that we are in a bit of a muddle, too—it would be silly to suggest otherwise. However, it was comical to witness the right hon. and learned Gentleman—who is usually so incisive and crisp, and considered such a dreaded lawyer, and who will carve everyone up at the Dispatch Box—wade into deeper and deeper difficulties as he tried to grapple with his own party's policies on Europe and its monetary affairs.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman is himself being sucked into a religious war—from which my right hon. and hon. Friends have not been entirely free—over issues of tax theology that are of remote practical importance. The great religious wars of the late middle ages were fearsome affairs and were fought with terrible ferocity, but when they ended, few people could remember what they were about or the point of those conflicts. I fear that the same is true of our arguments over a single currency and a European central bank.

Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends and Opposition Members fail to realise that the chances of a central bank ever coming about are very remote. If it happens in years to come, that will be decided not by politicians, on dates set by bureaucrats in Brussels, and not even by treaty amendments. It will be determined by markets—industry, customers, consumers, and to some extent by central bank governors. They will decide whether it will be more convenient to operate a single currency running from Lisbon to Berlin, and from Reggio Calabria to Glasgow, or whether it will be more convenient, sensitive, flexible and articulated to operate separate currencies broadly within national zones.

Dame Elaine Kellett-Bowman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is exactly what my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said? If a sufficient number of countries want to use a single currency, they will do so—and if not, they will not do so.

Mr. Howell: That is exactly the argument made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor in respect of the hard ecu, to which I shall refer shortly.

If people imagine that Karl Otto Pohl, the Bundesbank's distinguished governor, does not understand that argument, they are wrong. He knows perfectly well that it will take years to establish a central bank. He is in no hurry, even though he is chairman of the committee that is supposedly drafting its structure. He understands perfectly well that such a concept is possible on the other side of nowhere. Therefore, he is almost certainly drafting models that are so perfect as to be unattainable. His latest suggestion is that such a bank should be free not only of all national political control but of any political control whatever, and should be spinning in space, run by a lot of platonic philosophers and bankers in a dreamy way that could never be acceptable to nation states and their Governments, or even to the Community.

A great deal of unnecessary energy and aggro has been expended over a concept which probably will not be realised, and over which we anyway have no control. There is no hurry, and in the meantime, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster (Dame E. Kellett-Bowman) points out, the opportunity exists for markets to decide whether to trade on their local currencies or on a good strong ecu. The ecu already exists, and many people choose to use it. Invoicing in the ecu already occurs. Some people are paid in that currency, but need to change it into their local currency at a bank.

[Mr. Howell]

The hard ecu is not a bad idea, and I would argue with Mr. Pohl about dismissing it out of hand. The hard ecu offers the market a menu, to ascertain whether it wants to use that currency. I am surprised that some people are disparaging about its use. If there were a hard ecu as good as the deutschmark, I should be happy to be paid in it and to trade in it. I am sure that many commercial concerns throughout Europe would be equally happy to trade, invoice and run their books in a hard ecu, although others may prefer pesetas or sterling.

I make a plea to my right hon. Friends and to Opposition Members who are not beyond listening not to turn on each other and to tear each other's eyes out. Instead, we should confront the realities and speak positively to our European friends—those who are perhaps a little too excited about establishing a single currency and who want to set dates, and those who are amenable to positive and co-operative argument rather than to defensive attacks and assaults.

It seems to me that the operation of a single currency is very unlikely to happen, as it would require the total convergence of the European economies. I do not accept the view that such a convergence would be impossible because some nations are poor and others are rich, nor the view of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley), who seemed to put us in the forever poor category—as though Britain is permanently handicapped and will never catch up with the big boys.

The future might be quite different. The famed united Germany could get into trouble. It is about to run the most gigantic budget deficit, almost as large as America's—DM140 million, or about £50 billion—for next year. It seems likely that Germany will have to raise interest rates to cope with that, and it may no longer be the overwhelming, strongest magnet for attracting all capital in Europe. Germany is attracting such support now, which is dangerous in that it forces up the interest rates of us all. Nevertheless, I do not accept the view that the United Kingdom is a dispossessed region that is bound to lose out from fixed exchange rates or freer trade. That view has been expressed down the years by all opponents of the single market, but it is totally wrong.

We must be realistic and accept that the United Kingdom will have high interest rates for a good time to come—probably several years. The German affair is turning out expensive, and there is a vast shortage of capital in the world. Japan has ceased to export capital, and it will become more expensive stuff. If we want to maintain a sound currency, we shall have to keep our interest rates high. We have no choice. If we lowered them, capital would immediately move away, sterling would weaken and inflation would increase. Any attempt to expand our economy by escaping high interest rates would lead on the contrary to its contraction. That is the nature of the international monetary system.

There is little discretion available even to Parliament. It may be magnificent to stand here and say that this Parliament should have ultimate control of this country's monetary and fiscal policy, but in reality any Chancellor or central bank governor has only limited discretion. Those who stand up and make fine speeches, saying that Parliaments shall prevail in the matter of interest rates, are practising a cruel deception on the people. The reality is that, in open economies, there is little room for manoeuvre.

It is not good for the House or the country to be diverted from the realities. In the year ahead, we face some kind of recession. I hope that it will not be deep, but the United States is facing a recession and Japan is getting into grave difficulties over its financial structure. Those waves will be far bigger than anything that we can counter. We cannot avoid recession. Nor would any other Government be able to avoid it.

We can act prudently in adversity and we can possibly run a slightly—I emphasise the word slightly—less tough fiscal policy than we would otherwise have to pursue. We could move away from budget surpluses to perhaps just a balanced budget or a small deficit—let us consider what the Germans are doing—that would be prudent, but it would have to be carefully done. Other than that, the constraints upon the Chancellor, on the governor of the central bank—who should be reinforced—on this Parliament and on any realists are enormous. If we do not tell people so, we are deceiving them.

What we can do is to improve the supply side of our economy, as we have sought to do over the years. I do not accept that we are a crippled outlying country in Europe. We certainly have some weak patches. For a decade, I have argued that we should do more to maintain our infrastructure. I argued that in 1981-82 when I was in Government and I made no progress. I argue that case again today. Our transport infrastructure is inadequate and the education and training infrastructures also need to be built up in difficult times.

The reality is not that some wonderful control over the great forces of international monetary policy exists, which can be regained by Parliament, but simply that 1991 will be a damnably difficult year for all of us. To see this nation through we shall need prudent fiscal and monetary policies.

I have no doubt but that with the right leadership we can certainly go through and regain the lost momentum of the 1980s, based on sound finance, a strong and positive role in Europe and vigorous enterprise. It can most certainly be done and those who suggest otherwise are conjuring up bogeys and fantasies, which we should not accept and which should not frighten us away.

8.30 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): Last week at our party meeting when I said that I wanted to speak today I looked forward to discussing the economy. I specially looked forward to telling the House of my experience when I recently visited an enterprise in my constituency —an enterprise which had had a growth rate in excess of 11 per cent. for most of the last decade. I was told that in recent months its export orders were running at a mere 40 per cent. of the previous year's level, the drop being due to an overvalued currency. We entered the exchange rate mechanism at too high a level. The enterprise I visited told me that it could have lived with a rate of between DM2·60 and DM2·65. At present, this country and that enterprise will suffer.

With the House's indulgence I intend to speak on a different aspect of the Queen's Speech—security, and especially security in Northern Ireland. The reason for my

change of course was the events in my constituency at the weekend—the massacre at Castor Bay on the shores of Lough Neagh.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are discussing the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition dealing with the economy. I am sure that he will be able to use ingenuity to bring his remarks within that context.

Mr. Trimble: I am not sure that I wish to let so serious a subject be raised only indirectly and as a matter of ingenuity. I have been anxious to speak this evening simply to bring the grave concern of my constituents, and the great danger that what happened at the weekend will spark off yet another round of killings, to the attention of the House. If it is not possible to raise those important and grave matters before the House, then I have no desire to resort to subterfuge.

8.33 pm

Mr. William Ross (Londonderry, East): There was no murder in my constituency at the weekend, although there have been many elsewhere in previous weeks. Therefore, I shall not speak about the security situation, other than to say that the violence that we have experienced in Northern Ireland has had a grievous effect upon our economy, as it has upon all that we desire for the wealth of the people in Northern Ireland.

The Government have asked us to support their policy on the economy this evening, as it is outlined in the Gracious Speech on page 3, where it says that the

> "Government will maintain firm financial policies, strengthened by the Exchange Rate Mechanism, designed to reduce inflation and foster the conditions necessary for sustained growth . . . They will maintain firm control of public expenditure with the aim of keeping its share of national income on a downward trend."

That is a laudable objective, but the Opposition take a rather different view, and have tabled an amendment. The Government's point of view is open to many interpretations, but I regret that they do not seem prepared to do more for manufacturing industry, which is the well from which our wealth is drawn. Not only do we have to consider what the Government say in the Queen's Speech, we have to take into account other Government statements, not least the autumn statement made last week. We also have to take into account the Government's actions with regard to the exchange rate mechanism.

Twice in the course of this afternoon, we have heard references made to the German budget deficit. According to some hon. Members, it will be about £50 billion, and according to the tape, it will be half that sum. In either case, it is a considerable amount of money.

I remind the House that that money will have to be found somewhere. If the Germans do not raise internal taxation to take account of it, they will have to put up interest rates and, under the terms of the ERM, no doubt they will seek the support of sterling and other member currencies for the deutschmark. I mentioned this when I spoke on the subject when we entered the exchange rate mechanism. No one else has mentioned it today. It seems strange to me that this aspect of the ERM appears to have been forgotten in the general melee on the Government Benches, but it should not be forgotten by the House, so I remind hon. Members of it.

As I pointed out in a previous debate, this country will help to pay for German reunification, and it will get very little or perhaps nothing out of the benefits which will eventually flow from it.

Hon. Members have listened with care to what ex-Ministers have had to say today and yesterday, particularly the interesting speech by the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe). It was clear from what he said, and from what has been said in the past in the House for public consumption, that past statements were designed to conceal the reality of the deep and bitter disagreements about Europe which all of us knew in our hearts still existed within the Conservative party. The right hon. and learned Gentleman said that his quarrel was more about style than substance, but I suggest that there was little argument about style and a heck of a lot about substance. Our argument is about policy and his basic belief about the powers that the House should surrender to a supranational identity.

The consequences of what is going on in the Conservative party are now known to the world at large. Indeed, listening to Conservative Members in the Lobbies yesterday evening, I was irresistibly reminded of a flock of headless hens. It was quite interesting. I never thought I should see the day when the Conservative party would lose its head to the extent that it has clearly done in the past 24 hours.

Conservative Members now seem to be getting their legs under them again and to be trying to pull themselves together. Some of their speeches today have been carefully designed for that purpose and have been fairly successful. At least, that is the appearance to the outside world, although God knows what is happening under the surface —paddling away like a duck, I suppose. At least members of the Unionist party are united in our attitude to Europe. There has never been any doubt about where we stand. We are extremely sceptical of that organisation and of its work.

Mr. James Molyneaux (Lagan Valley): We have been for 20 years.

Mr. Ross: As my right hon. Friend the leader of our party says, we have occupied that position consistently for 20 years. Would to God other Members of the House had done the same. We simply cannot understand how a person can stand for election and thereafter complain when they did not tell the electorate their true attitude. They say that they have no faith in the ability of their countrymen to earn their living in the world. I have such faith in my fellow countrymen throughout the kingdom: I believe that they can earn their living in the world. Furthermore, they do not believe that they are capable of so organising the finances of the nation as to create the necessary conditions to allow their fellow countrymen to earn their living in the world. They want, therefore, to seek shelter, in some form or another, in Europe. Finally, they say that we should move towards a united states of Europe.

The right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) tried yesterday in his speech, as reported at column 463, to give the impression that there is a middle way, but I was surprised and disappointed to find that he took no steps to spell out that middle way. I am led to the conclusion that that was beyond even his considerable

[Mr. Ross]

powers. There is no middle way. Either we run our own affairs or they are run for us by someone else. It is as simple and straightforward as that.

If we go down the path towards a totally united Europe, the House will learn the lesson that Ulster learned over a very long period. Under the Government of Ireland Act 1920, we rapidly found out that, if we wished to remain within the kingdom, we had to keep in step. My party consistently made sure that that happened. Moreover, we found out that, by keeping in step, we had to be subsidised. Therefore, we were totally under the control of those who sit on the Treasury Bench, especially when it comes to Treasury matters.

We accepted that as the price of staying within the Union, which is where we decided to remain. That meant that freedom of movement was so limited that Stormont was reduced to rubber-stamping much of the legislation. Local councillors in Northern Ireland find that they are now in a similar position. They have no freedom of movement whatsoever.

The House will find that it is rapidly placed in a similar position if we introduce a single currency that is controlled by a central bank. The path that has been set before us would lead not to a great but to a little Europe, with limited horizons. I should like the House to consider that prospect.

The Opposition ask us to support their motion. They condemn the Government but they express no view on the question that is rending the Conservative party asunder. All hon. Members know that the same argument rages on the Opposition Benches. So far, it has not come to the surface, but the argument rages under the surface on this side, just as it has raged on the Government side for so many years. I do not know when it will come to the surface, but it most assuredly will come to the surface one day.

The right hon. Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) reminded us that there is all-party agreement on certain subjects. As I listened to the speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith), I was irresistibly reminded of the circus act in which a fellow rides two horses at once. In the case of the Conservative horses, they slowly part until at last the elastic legs do not stretch far enough and the rider has to get on to one horse or the other. The Labour party also seems to be trying to ride two horses. The problem is that one is going clockwise while the other is going anti-clockwise. That is an extremely difficult act to perform. The rider will fall off very soon. The sooner the debate in the Labour party is out in the open so that the people of this country can decide, so much the better it will be for the nation, the House and both major parties.

The marketplace for this nation is the world, not Europe. We need freedom of action. Power over the economy and control of the money supply, which the House fought for centuries to wrest from the Crown, should be retained. The right hon. Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) referred to that much more elegantly than I could ever do. Control of the economy should remain with the House and all the people we represent. That is fundamental to the life of the nation. The more clearly that is understood by the electorate and all hon. Members, the better it will be for us all.

I am well aware that Governments manipulate the economy so that they can be re-elected. However, that does not always work; the electorate sometimes decide that a change of Government is needed. The debate will continue not only during but after the election of the leader of the Conservative party. Our immediate and continuing concern, however, is the need for sound money. Problems will arise soon because of what is happening in Germany. The rise in public expenditure outlined in the autumn statement caused me to ask how the United Kingdom Government intend to maintain sound money. According to the tables of projected expenditure, in real terms there is to be a rise in public expenditure of £15 billion up to 1993-94. In cash terms, that is £35 billion. A large element of inflation must be built into that figure.

I hope that the Minister will tell us how the Government expect that huge and continuing rise in public expenditure to be financed. I asked the Chancellor of the Exchequer the same question last week, during the exchanges after he had made his autumn statement. He said that he did not believe that the United Kingdom would experience the problem that the Germans now face for the first time in many years—a public sector borrowing requirement. Are the Government confident that they can raise this huge additional sum by means of a buoyant economy? Are the Government certain that the British economy will be able to generate the money, or will they once more have to go to the money markets for a huge sum? I should deeply deplore such a course, which would leave a trail of misery in its wake. The further we keep away from a public sector borrowing requirement the better.

We need to be told exactly what the position is. The Government ought to provide their real economic projections and tell us how on earth they intend to finance this huge extra expenditure.

8.47 pm

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): The key phrase that we associate with the Prime Minister is the one that she used some time ago: there is no alternative, or TINA. She created the impression that nothing could be done other than according to her approach. Hers was the only option; her option was to be accepted, or else. That approach was applied throughout the economy.

We were told that we had to accept, almost as an article of faith, that this country was subject to the perfect workings of the free market. When the free market was tried, tested and found wanting, we were told that the market had to be free and fair. Phrases such as "the level playing field" were introduced. Then we were told that inflation was out of political control, that it was an arithmetical equation, beyond political and economic intervention. We were also told that it was an accident, almost a non-insurable risk, even an act of God.

Yesterday in the House, we learned, perhaps in the most significant statement by the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe)—it was a most revealing personal remark, and press comments have been made about how personal the right hon. and learned Gentleman's speech was—that he pinned personal responsibility for high inflation and high interest rates on the Prime Minister. He pointed to the Prime Minister as

the cause of inflation. He said that her domineering approach to economic policy in the last few years was the cause of inflation.

What has been the impact of the Prime Minister's economic policies? It reveals itself increasingly as the deliberate manufacture of unemployment. There was also propagated the view that unemployment was not caused by Government policy. However, Patrick Minford from Liverpool university, who was referred to earlier, argued that unemployment and low pay should be used as a key instrument in bringing down inflation.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): The hon. Gentleman said that the Government are following a course of deliberately creating unemployment. Will he accept that the level of job creation in the United Kingdom since 1983 is much greater than the level of job creation in any other European Community country?

Mr. Battle: I am grateful for that intervention, because it shows how eclipsed the minds of Tory Members are becoming. The hon. Gentleman talked about 1983. Perhaps he would like to return to the beginning of his Administration in 1979. He would then find that the unemployment graph rose massively under his Government, to a figure approaching 4 million. Even the figures with which we are presented now—we all accept that they are fiddled down, after 26 changes—show that unemployment is still higher, at 1·63 million, than it ever was under a Labour Government or in the preceding decade. We have had high unemployment under this Government, and from that high base it is now moving up again.

Underlying the Government's policies is the manufacture of unemployment. What is worse, underpinning that has been the policy of chipping away at the social security for those who are unemployed. I have sat in the House and watched Bills go through which make the unemployed wait longer for access to benefits after losing their jobs. I have seen the Bill containing the availability for work test with the condition that people accept any job regardless of the level of pay—and in areas such as Leeds, West, pay can be very low.

The Government have a conscious policy of pricing people into work. That may be becoming a footnote. Even the poverty figures became a footnote to a parliamentary question on the last day of the Session in the summer. We express shock and horror when Saddam Hussein turns the language round and describes the hostages as guests. However, the Government have been using and manipulating language in the same way. The Prime Minister has said that everyone in Britain is participating in increasing wealth. That is patently not true, even according to the Government's own figures.

We know that unemployment has been higher during the time of this Government than ever before. However, the key shift is not from employment to unemployment but from manufacturing to the financial and services sector. Accompanying that has been the shift to temporary, part-time and low-paid work. Unless we analyse and understand that, we cannot understand the damage that has been done to our economy over the past 10 years. Let us not forget that it was the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) who was responsible for the erosion of our manufacturing base, when one of his first Budgets effectively wiped out one third of the manufacturing jobs in this country.

In constituencies such as mine, the staple employment was in engineering, clothing, textiles and printing. The loss of such jobs has a devastating effect. I accept that there has been a growth in the financial and services sector. Leeds has a banking sector and an office sector, and development is still taking place. However, that does not replace jobs on a scale to match the loss that has occurred in the past decade.

On Canal road in my constituency, there is a helpful image. On the left-hand side is the Armley industrial museum, in which one can see textile machinery and engineering as it took place in the past. Schoolchildren visit the museum to see the industrial and manufacturing past of Leeds. On the other side of Canal road is Farnell electronics. That is a new technology industry. It is expanding but it is not replacing the jobs lost in the textiles, engineering and printing industries shown in the museum.

I could cite daily reports from the regional Confederation of British Industry and the chambers of trade and commerce which show that a further erosion of our manufacturing base is taking place now at a time of high interest rates and when firms are threatened with the uniform business rate. Rather than invest in the manufacturing base of our country, the Chancellor referred to investment in the commercial sector. That is interesting because the commercial sector includes the financial and services sector as well as manufacturing. If one isolates and examines the manufacturing sector, it is clear that there has been a lack of investment because the Government chose the consumer boom approach.

When the Chancellor derides credit controls, it may be worth his reflecting upon the fact that artificially engineered house price booms, especially in the south-east, resulted in people staking the rapidly increasing asset value of their property against further borrowing for cars, holidays and so on. That spending has resulted in the massive trade deficit now facing us.

Areas such as mine in Leeds understand the need for a dynamic manufacturing base. However, the Government's policies make the outlook bleak. Before the people are again asked to pay the price of the Government's mismanagement, they should be given the opportunity to elect a Labour Government who would adopt a dynamic and different approach to the manufacturing base.

8.57 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stafford): I was interested in the line taken by the hon. Member for Leeds, West (Mr. Battle). The argument about economic and monetary union will lead to the socialists squealing loudly when they realise that the charge capping arrangement that will be imposed under binding rules by the proposed central bank will cause maximum dislocation for the regions which they purport to represent most effectively in the House. Also, others elsewhere in the European Community will suffer, because when the paymaster, which is likely to be the German economy, finds that the poorer countries are running budget deficits, somebody will be sent over to say, "We do not like the fact that you are spending this money," and then, "You cannot spend it." The binding rules that will be imposed by the independent,

[Mr. William Cash]

unaccountable and unelected central bankers will thus impose upon those whom Opposition Members purport to represent the sort of misery that will create internal divisions and jealousy within Europe.

Further, it is part of the arguments that I have heard from some members of my own party and from others elsewhere that we should have a hard-core federal system which should exclude those very people in eastern Europe who most need investment to enable them to attach to the growth in their countries the democracy so hard won over the past couple of years. In reality, a central bank and a single currency are the worms in the bud of the EC, and their impact upon democracy and the withdrawal of consent which go along with them make me so bitterly opposed. As I said the other day, it would be the greatest irony if the springtime of nations turned into a silent spring for the people of eastern and central Europe when the penny drops and they find that that is the consequence.

Some people have said that all that will not happen and that it is just a jeu d'esprit on the part of other member states, that it is simply no more or less than a figment of the imagination and that we do not need to get too worried about it. The arguments for the central bank and the federalism underpinning it are constructed on arguments of the 1950s, whereas the arguments that we propose are relevant to the 1990s and to the next century.

A few days ago, the Commission published its own paper entitled, "One Market, One Money" in which it graphically described what it expects to happen. It stated:

"The role of national budgetary policies will be substantially revised, with new needs for autonomy to permit flexibility combined with enhanced discipline over excessive deficits and coordination to ensure an appropriate policy-mix for the Community."

That means that the European Commission and those who support the proposed treaty amendments will gain control over the budgetary policies which lie before the House. Those who criticise the Prime Minister—I noticed my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) making this criticism yesterday—for not apparently going down the route of automatic progression——

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): Does my hon. Friend agree that what the Prime Minister was seeking to do before she got on the train of economic and monetary union was to ask where the train was going and what the price of the ticket would be? Surely most passengers would adopt that approach in respect of any train.

Mr. Cash: I could not more fully support my hon. Friend's view. I put it to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East in his last attendance at business questions that that was no more than a one-way ticket to federalism. That is exactly what lies at the heart of our objections to the line being taken within the Community and the Commission. The proposals are now before us. There is no doubt whatever that those who seek to suggest that all this will take place only in the year 2000 or in 1994 are missing the central point.

The treaty amendments are due to be discussed and negotiated at the intergovernmental conference which is to take place within a few months. If the treaty amendments implementing the proposals are made, the effect will be to set irrevocably in concrete the very arrangements that Opposition Members say will not happen. I make the same point with respect to some of my hon. Friends. They must appreciate that this is a determined drive to achieve a federal Europe. My hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Knowles) nods—he is an honest federalist, he knows what is in the pipeline and he wants it to happen. The difference is that I do not.

However, no responsible leader, contender or challenger, such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), could possibly have agreed, and nor could the Leader of the Opposition possibly have agreed, to the proposed 1994 deadline without actually having proposals put before them. It would have been the height of irresponsibility. Nor can they say that there is an automatic progression towards that goal, because if that were the case there would be no need for the treaty amendments which are being proposed.

We need to get the message out to the public at large to make sure that they understand that the issue is not merely about a theoretical sovereignty but about their right as ordinary individuals and electors to choose the kind of Government they want. It is a simple question and it goes to the heart of the reason why we are in this House—to represent the interests of our electorate.

That applies equally to Conservative and Labour Members. As I said in a debate the other day, the question is, "Who governs?" We are aware of the draft amendments being proposed and we know the answers to the questions. The other member states have attempted to pre-empt the issue by setting the date of 1994 before discussions have taken place. It would have been the height of irresponsibility for us not to take the position that we took.

I ask the British electorate, the man in the street, to consider the implications for them of not only general public expenditure but specific expenditure on defence, health, education and social services being capped. If countries were to spend more than they were allowed, the squeeze would immediately be put on them. Those who, like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East, that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was tending to lead people astray are themselves guilty of ducking the issue and leading people astray.

We did not sign up to the next stage of Delors or to automatic progression to a federal Europe, and the evidence is there for all to see. Some people want us to take that route and are prepared to issue ultimatums if we do not agree to do so. The reality is that the House is on the line. We have a responsibility to discharge, and I believe that the majority of hon. Members, let alone Conservative Members, will support the Prime Minister in the challenge to her.

9.6 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Labour Members are fed up with the debate on the Queen's Speech being turned into personal statements by Conservative Members about whom they support in the leadership election. We are simply not interested in the internal wrangling of the Conservative party or in Conservative Members washing their dirty linen in public. We are far more concerned about the facts about this debate and this Administration. The only thing on which I agree with the Prime Minister

is her statement that the next few days and weeks should be conducted on the basis not of personalities but of the facts before the nation.

The facts show a nation in crisis and a party unfit to govern. The Queen's Speech provides no benefits for my constituents. For example, 1 million people are on the waiting list for operations. In the past 10 years, 300 hospitals have closed and 70,000 beds have been lost. If we are to believe newspaper reports, by March a further 4,500 beds will be lost on economic grounds. My constituent, Mr. Pemberton, who is 74 and who served in the second world war defending this country, has to wait 29 weeks for a hip replacement operation. He was told by the Leicester Royal Infirmary that he must wait in a queue of several hundred people. Within the Leicestershire health authority area, 9,600 people are on the waiting list for operations.

Tomorrow, in Leicester we shall welcome the shadow Secretary of State for Education, who will speak to local teachers and visit local schools. The bill for repairs to our schools is £3 billion, there are 10,000 teacher vacancies and more than half the profession has left in the past 11 years.

There are no solutions to the housing crisis in the Queen's Speech. More than 1·25 million people are on housing waiting lists, 11,000 of whom are in Leicester. People visit my surgery and those of other hon. Members asking for transfers and for homes because they want to begin a life on their own.

As for the crime figures, 4 million crimes were committed in Britain in the past year alone. By the time this last hour of the debate concludes, a further 10 crimes will have been committed in my county of Leicestershire. Then there are the overcrowded gaols. Young people in Armley prison committed suicide to escape the appalling conditions there.

The economy is in crisis. The trade deficit is so embarrassing that the Chancellor does not wish to mention it any more. The director general of the Confederation of British Industry, a friend of the Prime Minister, urges the right hon. Lady to get her act together. In the last month alone, 487 firms went bankrupt under this Government.

I wish to make a special plea in the closing minutes of the debate on the Loyal Address for the 1990-91 Session. It is a plea for the textile and footwear industries which have been devastated by the Government's policies over the past 11 years. High interest rates and the high level of imports are affecting the lives of ordinary people in my constituency. Two jobs are lost every hour in those two industries. Hon. Members are united on such issues as the multi-fibre arrangement. Both sides of the House agree that something must be done to protect those two vital industries. In one way or another, one third of my constituents depend on them for their livelihood. If this trend continues and nothing is done within the next year, I am afraid that those industries will cease to exist. They will go the same way as the textile and footwear industries in America, which have been destroyed by the high level of import penetration.

The problem of the way in which this country has been governed over the past 11 years cannot be solved by a leadership election. Nothing will change if the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), or the Leader of the House or the Foreign Secretary succeed the Prime Minister. It does not really matter. What matters is the election of a new Government with policies which will directly benefit the people of Britain.

9.11 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): My responsibility is to review six days of debate—a task so formidable that there is not exactly a sell-out in the Chamber.

The first of several aspects of the debate which impressed me were the speeches of the mover and seconder of the Loyal Address. The right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) and the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley) charmed and amused the House with their wit and humour. Their speeches were excellent. The right hon. Member for Ayr talked of his predecessor, whom I may call Younger the Elder, as that was one of his ancestors. *[Interruption.]* I am delighted to see the right hon. Gentleman take his seat. He referred to former Conservative Members for his constituency. I have to observe, however, that, despite the right hon. Gentleman's formidable career and record in the House, I fully expect that he will be the last Tory to sit for that constituency. The hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes perhaps gave us a hint of his own wistful crystal ball gazing when he referred to the policemen at the House being back after the next election. He may have been thinking that he would not be so lucky.

There have been moments of accidental humour, too. Yesterday, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said:

> "This country enjoys one of the most open and dynamic telecommunications markets in the world."—[*Official Report*, 13 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 449.]

I suspect that his hon. Friend the Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham), the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, agrees. There have been many other moments of humour, some intended and some not, and a wide variety of effective speeches from both sides of the House. Last year I paid tribute to Ian Gow's speech in the equivalent debate. I miss his puckish wit, his friendliness and his courage. We also miss Allan Roberts, Sean Hughes, Mike Carr, Pat Wall, Allen Adams and Norman Buchan, and my thoughts and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends are with their families.

It is a pleasure to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) on an excellent maiden speech during the debate. He brings to this place a formidable knowledge of education at many levels. His humour, too, will be welcomed, but as a lifelong supporter of Newcastle United I will not make any jokes about Everton.

I am delighted to welcome two new colleagues—my hon. Friends the Members for Bootle (Mr. Benton) and for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney) whose crushing victories against the background of this debate and the autumn statement are merely the latest expression of the continuing strong desire of the British people to be rid of the present incompetent, discredited Government. After those stunning Labour results, many more Conservative Members—not only the right hon. Member for Ayr and the hon. Member for Richmond and Barnes—will be nervously scanning the "situations vacant" columns. Indeed, on those results, about 190 Conservative Members will not be returning after the general election.

I must make a passing reference to the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), the former Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons. After yesterday, I shall miss him even more than I had imagined, and I shall certainly miss him in his role as Leader of the House. He had an excellent

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record in that post, but there was one blemish on and otherwise good record. I refer to the Government's continuing failure to establish, as they have a duty under Standing Orders to establish, a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. They have wholly defaulted on that obligation, and we look to the new Leader of the House to remedy that as soon as possible.

This is the 12th Gracious Speech that we have considered in the Government's term of office.

"My Government affirm their strong commitment to the European Community. They intend to play a full and constructive part in its further development and enlargement . . . My Government will give priority in economic policy to controlling inflation through the pursuit of firm monetary and fiscal policies . . . The quality of education will be maintained and improved".

Those are laudable aims, to be sure, and I see the hon. Member for Pembroke (Mr. Bennett) agreeing with them. The problem is that they are not from the Gracious Speech of 1990 but from the Gracious Speech of 1979. Eleven years on, the Government are still making identical promises to this House and to the people of Britain.

Now, after three Parliaments with large majorities, after 11 years in power, after every penny of £91 billion of oil revenues has been frittered away, we are back to the promises of 11 years ago. Now, with inflation at 10·9 per cent. compared with a European Community average of 5·4 per cent. and an average among the other countries in the exchange rate mechanism of just 4 per cent., now, with interest rates at 14 per cent., with a balance of payments deficit forecast by the Chancellor of £15·5 billion this year, with Britain in recession however the Chancellor chooses to describe it, and with rising unemployment, this year's Gracious Speech says that the Government will

"reduce inflation and foster the conditions necessary for sustained growth."

Who can believe that? Why should we believe it? The Government's record is a mixture of incompetence and deception. I searched in vain during the six days of debate for any recognition of the Government's abject failures in the speeches by Tory Members, but with one or two notable exceptions, my search was a waste of time.

Observers of the debate will recognise a common theme in many Tory speeches. It is to be found in the words of the old song, "Just One More Chance". After a decade of division at home and in Europe, with a Prime Minister isolated and indeed embattled in her own party and completely out of touch with the people, that is the plea from Tory Members more interested in saving their skins than in saving the country. Putting Tory party interests before those of the nation will probably extend to the engineering of a mini-boom. That is the Government's short-term election strategy now, as it was in 1987, and it would be a further disaster for the long-term interests of the British economy.

By a remarkable stroke of fate, on 14 November 1985 the Prime Minister gave an extended interview to the *Financial Times*. The article stated:

"Mrs. Thatcher wants another five or six years as Britain's Prime Minister in order to complete the economic transformation of the country that she embarked upon when she was elected in 1979."

Having had the other five years, she has got us right back to square one. This is where she came in.

My right hon. and hon. Friends have graphically illustrated the Government's litany of failures and the fact that their only strategy for the 1990s is to repeat the mistakes of the 1980s. We have also shown that only the Labour party has the workable policies and commitment to tackle the problems that Britain faces. A Labour Government will ensure a properly balanced economy in the United Kingdom. We will take action to bridge the skills gap through a coherent national training strategy.

According to the Chancellor's autumn statement, the Government are set to cut the employment budget by £300 million in the forthcoming year. They are also reducing the employment training scheme for the long-term unemployed. The next Labour Government will end such cuts. We know that training is one of the keys to a more successful future.

We are also committed to a modern regional policy along the lines of our main competitors in Europe and elsewhere. Already this year there has been a cut of 67 per cent. in regional enterprise grants. Regional development grants are crucial, especially in areas like my constituency, where even now Ministers are refusing to allow us to take advantage of European regional development fund money. They are denying that investment to west Cumbria as a deliberate act of ministerial policy.

Britain needs a Government prepared to work in partnership with industry, management and employees.

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman subscribe to the idea that under the new arrangements, of which the Labour party apparently approves, there could be a central bank? If so, how can he equate the amount of money that he is now saying should be spent with the binding rules and the imposition of budget deficits that would be imposed on his Government by that bank?

Dr. Cunningham: I am sorry that I gave way to the hon. Gentleman's obsession with that subject. Nothing that has been said from the Opposition Front Bench in six days of debate has committed the Labour party to a central bank beyond political control, and the hon. Gentleman is aware of that.

Over the past 11 years, the Government have imposed contentious and ill-conceived changes on the state education system. Standards are declining and schools all over the country, including the Valley infant school in my constituency, are simply crumbling before the eyes of parents, teachers and pupils.

The Government's neglect is widespread. Despite a national outcry, the Government could find only £77 million extra for school building and repairs. That may sound a lot to people outside this place, but when that is set beside the more than £50 million allocated to a tiny percentage of pupils in city technology colleges, it is clear where the Government's priorities lie.

Our great universities are also suffering. In the very important area of science and engineering research, the Government are funding only one half of the alpha-rated proposals going to the Medical Research Council. It is increasingly difficult to recruit postgraduate research students of the right calibre. That cannot be allowed to continue if we are to compete in Europe in the 1990s and beyond. Britain's education system requires sustained commitment, which only the Labour party is willing to provide.

I was pleased to hear the new Secretary of State for Education and Science—the third in 15 months—make a public commitment to the state education system. It would

carry more conviction if he and his fellow members of the Cabinet sent their own children to state schools. All those Secretaries of State have been rapidly moved on by the Prime Minister. Even her latest appointment is already being undermined for his rejection of education vouchers. To borrow a phrase of the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East the new Secretary of State is

"being subverted by some casual comment or impulsive answer."—[*Official Report*, 13 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 465.]

A Labour Government will increase choice and opportunity and help the one third of children who, in the words of Her Majesty's senior chief inspector of schools, are getting a raw deal under this Government. Those are not our words. We aim to make our young people the best educated and trained in Europe.

Why is it that, after 11 years of the Prime Minister's policies, our great hospitals are closing children's wards? The most famous children's ward in the most famous children's hospital in Britain, and probably in Europe, has been closed. Thousands of sick children have been nursed back to health in the Peter Pan ward of Great Ormond street hospital since it was opened in the late 1930s. That ward is now closed. How bitter that news must be for the millions of people who contributed so generously to the wishing well fund to maintain that hospital and its care for children. So much for caring Conservatism.

The authoritative British Social Attitudes annual report due out tomorrow shows that British people reject the values espoused by the Government. Now, the Government and the Conservative party are irrevocably split and it is shameful that at such a critical time for Britain at home and abroad we are left with a disabled Prime Minister and no effective Government or leadership. Once again, the Tories are letting Britain down.

In the debate on 1979 Loyal Address, the present chairman of the Conservative party, speaking of the Prime Minister, said:

"it is difficult to find that narrow strip of land that lies between rebellion and sycophancy."— [*Offical Report*, 15 May 1979; Vol. 967, c. 57.]

Contemporary research does not record whether he ever found it. Nor are there any prizes for guessing, if he did, which way he jumped off it. At any event, he is now deeply engulfed in a quagmire of his own choosing, as the failed Tory campaigns continue to demonstrate. The same cannot be said of the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East.

Contrast the two: the Prime Minister in secrecy stabbed him in the back—he in public stabbed her in the front. The right hon. and learned Member, in a speech of considerable courage and stunning candour, confirmed the Opposition's and the country's worst fears. In my 20 years in the House, I cannot recall a more devastating indictment of a Prime Minister of any party. The right hon. and learned Gentleman confirmed many of Labour's accusations and criticisms in the past decade and his words about the Prime Minister support the oft-repeated views of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman's accusation of her misconduct of Cabinet Government, his determination to expose her serious misjudgment of Britain's best interests, illustrate how strongly he believes that the Prime Minister has failed our country. His exposure of the Prime Minister's reckless determination to have her own way at any price explains his own and other resignations from the Cabinet. The Prime Minister clearly puts her own prejudices and desire to dominate before sound policies and good Government.

The Cabinet's divisions over Europe have not prevented the Government from supporting disastrous policies at home. That is why we now have poll tax, private water monopolies, crumbling schools and a run-down national health service. That is why Britain is isolated and lagging behind other western nations. The Tory Government have failed precisely because Cabinet Minister have never had the guts to stand up and be counted in front of the Prime Minister.

There is no doubt that a Prime Minister who regularly talks tough about inflation has been an engine of inflation, or that a Prime Minister who regularly claims to want to create a climate for enterprise has damaged British interests, or that a Prime Minister who boasts about defending British interests has, through impulsive outbursts, seriously damaged them. So far as we can tell, the Prime Minister is the only politician on record who has received directions to the taxidermist from an alleged dead sheep and an alleged dead parrot. As she surveys her Government and a Conservative party split asunder, seething with revolt and destabilised by the blows of the electors, she must reflect on the words of Thomas Wyatt:

"They flee from me, that sometime did me seek . . .
I have seen them gentle, tame, and meek, that now are wild".

Against that background of hopeless divisions, continuing policy failure and manifest incompetence, is it any surprise that we have seen this week a programme from the Government devoid of ideas, courage or Ministers of the calibre to do what is best for Britain? Our country does not need another member of that broken team or that divided party to lead another Tory Government into failure, for they all share the guilt. What people want is a general election. They want to decide who the next Prime Minister will be. As they have shown throughout Britain in 1990, that choice will be a Labour Government, led by my right hon. Friend. That election is the only way to end the present debacle. For us, it cannot come too soon. We are ready to govern. Let the people decide.

9.33 pm

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): It is a great personal privilege for me to follow my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) as Leader of the House. Many have already paid great tributes to my right hon. and learned Friend for his long and most distinguished service to this country in so many capacities over the past 25 years, and I warmly join them in that.

I want tonight to single out my right hon. and learned Friend's role in the past 16 months as Leader of the House and thank him for the splendid way in which he carried it out. He has a well-deserved reputation as a reforming Leader of the House. I look forward to continuing the work that he set in hand under your aegis, Mr. Speaker, and in conjunction with the hon. Members for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) and for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the House of Commons Commission, to modernise the way in which we organise our affairs in the House. I look forward also to the continued co-operation of colleagues too numerous to mention on both sides of the

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House on whom I shall rely in the Services Committee and its Sub-Committees, in the Select Committee on Televising of Proceedings of the House and the Privileges Committee, and to suggestions—always I hope, helpful and supportive—from my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton (Sir P. Emery) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing (Mr. Higgins).

I wish to join the hon. Member for Copeland in his tributes to the proposer and seconder of the motion, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) and my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes (Mr. Hanley). I have always regarded my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr as one of the wisest and most level-headed Members of this place. As a fellow Scot, and now as Chairman of the Select Committee on Televising the Proceedings of the House, I hope that he will assure the constituent to whom he referred that the cameras present no threat to the honourable tradition of quoting from Rabbie Burns. That is something that one would expect, as television was invented by another Scot, John Logie Baird.

My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond and Barnes delighted the House with his mimicry and acting talent, for which there will clearly be a continuing demand. It is complemented by acute intelligence and knowledge and experience of the issues in which he specialises.

I am glad also to congratulate the hon. Members for Knowsley, South (Mr. O'Hara) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Bellotti) on their maiden speeches. Both mentioned education matters, which are of great interest to me. I cannot let the charge of underfunding pass, which one hon. Gentleman raised and which the hon. Member for Copeland tried to make stick a moment ago. In schools, we have increased spending per pupil by over 40 per cent. in real terms in the past 10 years. The autumn statement confirmed that both capital and current spending by local education authorities in 1991-92 will be able to rise by 16 per cent. There will be a total of over £3 billion extra for education next year. That massive increase demonstrates our continued commitment to education as a priority.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I wonder whether my right hon. Friend saw the edition of the *Daily Mail*, which carried a report on how the money to which he referred was being spent, especially in Labour areas, in putting teachers in front of pupils or in spending on bureaucrats. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be urging on his successor as Secretary of State for Education and Science, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), that that ratio is not brought into effect generally.

Mr. MacGregor: I know that my hon. Friend will realise that I was focusing upon that in relation to the amount of money that was being held back in respect of local management of schools when I was in my previous capacity. I know that my successor and his ministerial colleagues will continue with the campaign.

Before I refer to the economy, there are two matters——

Mr. Robert Hughes (Aberdeen, North): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I am coming to the point that I think the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise.

Before I refer to the economy, there are two matters to which I should refer as Leader of the House. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton raised earlier in the debate several procedural matters to which I wish to reply on other more suitable occasions. But there was one to which I believe that it would be appropriate to respond tonight. He asked that I should announce the parliamentary calendar at the start of this Session as recommended by the Procedure Committee in 1979, and beguilingly suggested that that could establish me as the most popular man in the House.

I cannot go quite that far, so I must forgo that pleasure. But I hope that it will be for the convenience of the House if I say now that, subject to the satisfactory course of business, I expect the House to adjourn for the Christmas recess on Thursday 20 December and to return in the week beginning 7 January. As Easter next year falls at the end of March, the Easter recess will include the week immediately after Easter day, Sunday 31 March. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Honiton will regard that as responding in the right spirit to the Procedure Committee recommendation of which he spoke.

Secondly, I know that hon. Members are interested in a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. I have been looking into it and will continue to do so. But I have to say that I very much doubt whether it will be possible to resolve the impasse to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East referred last year, which had lasted up till then, and to which no practicable new solutions have emerged since.

Mr. Robert Hughes: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way as I wrote to him about the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs the day after he was appointed. Does not he recognise that a powerful report has come to the conclusion that the Standing Orders of the House have not been complied with and that he has a duty to say that he will do more than merely look into a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, and point out the dangers of the present position? Will he not say now that he will use his best endeavours to have such a Committee established?

Mr. MacGregor: I have said that I shall consider it, but I know from reading the documents that it is not an easy matter to resolve. As the House knows, there have been many opportunities to probe Scottish matters——

Dr. Cunningham *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I want to move on to the debate itself, so this is the last time that I shall give way.

Dr. Cunningham: I shall be brief, as I do not want the Leader of the House to run out of time. There is no impasse. We are perfectly prepared to establish a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs. Indeed, the Leader of the House has a duty to the House to establish that Committee.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall certainly consider the matter, but I am aware of the real difficulties——

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. MacGregor: I must not give way again, because we began the replies late and there is a great deal to which to respond.

The speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East (Mr. Smith) was astonishing for its total

lack of any reference to Labour's policies, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Worthing so accurately pointed out. Empty phrases—or complete waffle, as several of my hon. Friends put it—rhetoric, not reality, were the hallmarks of his speech. I know why he did not mention a specific Labour policy. He knows that, where it is not empty, it is ambiguous. How right my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford (Mr. Tebbit) was when he said that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's phrase this afternoon, "You will not find unity in ambiguity", will return to haunt him for months to come. Where Labour policy attempts to be specific, it is fatally flawed.

shall mention just four fatal flaws. First, the Opposition have no policy on inflation. Indeed, the whole thrust of their policies would be to accelerate every inflationary trend, as they did when they were last in office. There would be increased spending and increased borrowing—and more of that in a moment—and the imposition of a national minimum wage, which, coupled with their plans to give unions major new rights and their wholehearted support of the social charter, would greatly add to inflationary wage pressures. They would shy away from interest rates to reduce excessive demand, and instead give a commitment to credit controls that are widely acknowledged to be unworkable.

No wonder the right hon. and learned Gentleman did not mention that this afternoon, because the last thing that he wanted was to be questioned about what it actually meant and how it could conceivably work. Even the Opposition's acceptance of membership of the ERM is hugely qualified and devalued by a determination to undermine its anti-inflationary rigour. Their intention to intervene in both public and private sector prices is about their sole distinctive contribution—as before—on inflation.

Of course that leads to the second fatal flaw—the Opposition's dislike of the enterprise economy and their gut reaction to every economic issue, which is to seek further intervention and control. The response yesterday of the hon. Member for Dunfermline, East (Mr. Brown) to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry's statement on telecommunications was a litany of interference, regulation and control; a yearning, as my right hon. Friend observed, for a return to a nationalised system, self-regulated, with no choice and no competition. They simply do not understand what makes a free market economy tick. Once again, as their amendment reveals, they will pursue a so-called industrial strategy, which means taking from successful businesses to pursue the state control and the state-directed national investment plans—my right hon. Friend the Chancellor read out the catalogue of intervention and direction—which failed so markedly in the past.

That leads to the third fatal flaw, that the Opposition do not understand the benefits of competition and choice, even when they are so evident before their very eyes. It is competition in telecommunications that has produced the range of choice and degree of innovation in the products now available to consumers; the competition in long-distance transport that has produced the better services and lower prices. In education, the grant-maintained schools, the city technology colleges, the assisted places schemes, the competition being induced by open enrolment and the funding mechanisms of local management of schools are extending choice for parents and helping to raise standards.

They are proving popular with parents, but it is that very popularity that so bugs the Opposition. They embrace conformity. They dislike the very idea that parents may have the chance to choose the opportunity that they seek for their child, rather than being forced to do what a remote authority compels upon them. They do not realise that it is the release of energy, the flowering of talent and enterprise that competition and choice involve, which has done so much to raise living standards in the past 10 years.

It is the fourth fatal flaw that will once again destroy the Opposition. There is a huge credibility gap between their spending ambitions and their so-called tax commitments. If the Opposition really

"don't want a level of taxation that is going to depress effort"

as the Leader of the Opposition said in a recent television interview, why did they vote against every Budget that reduced income tax? There is no point in reading the lips of the Leader of the Opposition. They will tell one something different every week.

Once again the Opposition's sums simply will not add up. Before the last election I undertook the task of costing the Opposition's then programme. I remember clearly how the jaw of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Sparkbrook (Mr. Hattersley) dropped when I first gave him the figure—£28 billion. But try as he might, he could not refute it. By the time of the election, it had risen much further—to £34 billion. He simply could not resist his colleagues' spending urges. When we told the electorate what that would cost them in increased taxes, and the electorate responded with horror, the Opposition were rumbled.

That is why the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is now trying to put the shackles on his Front-Bench colleagues. So now we have a new version—the latest great Labour con-trick. The Opposition criticise us for what they describe as the lack of resources devoted to the health service, education or the road programme. They therefore imply that the Labour party would spend more. The hon. Member for Copeland was at it again a few minutes ago, time after time. But they know they could not. They know that it is a sham. Again they are being rumbled.

Take education. A recent interview that the hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) had in "The Walden Programme" was a classic. The transcript says:

"Brian Walden: . . . It turns out that Labour has a Big Idea for education . . .

Jack Straw: Yes . . .

Brian Walden: And you have a whole series of proposals.

Jack Straw: Yes.

Brian Walden: And when I say to you 'And have you got the money for these', you say 'Well, as a matter of fact, immediately, no, it's all a bit hypothetical . . .

Jack Straw: No . . . we shall put more money into it.

Brian Walden: You'll borrow to do that, will you?

Jack Straw: No, we shall put more money into it than this Government.

Brian Walden: Smith has told us the tax increases we're going to have, they're very well defined. He's also told us where the money's . . . going . . . education's not going to get a penny of it, it's going to go on child benefits and pensions. Now where's your slot coming from?

Jack Straw: Our slot will come from the budget of the incoming Labour Government . . .

Brian Walden: So, you are going to borrow it?

Jack Straw: I don't know whether we shall borrow it . . .

Brian Walden: Of course . . . and you're going to borrow the money?

Jack Straw: No . . .

[Mr. MacGregor]

Brian Walden: If you don't get it out of taxation—and you promised you won't.

Jack Straw: Yes.

Brian Walden: You have got to get it out of borrowing.

Jack Straw: I've not promised you don't get it out of taxation.

Brian Walden: Ah, so you might increase taxes beyond what John Smith has pledged?

Jack Straw: . . . of course not . . .

Brian Walden: Well, then, it doesn't add up, Mr. Straw.

Jack Straw (hysterical): It does add up, it does add up, it does add up because this country is a country where, even under this Government there is some economic growth, we intend that there would be . . .

Brian Walden: Ah, it's from hypothetical economic growth that you haven't got yet and you can't measure."

That just about sums it up. Of course, the Labour party has not got the policies that will produce economic growth. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East is not a very successful choir master. He has taught his members the chorus, "As resources allow", but they keep forgetting the words of the verse.

Already the strains are showing. The right hon. and learned Gentleman quoted this afternoon from a Midland Montagu Greenwell analysis. Let me quote from another, in June this year. Its economists estimated that the full cost of Labour's spending plans is £50 billion a year. At an absolute minimum, they say that public spending would rise by £12 billion in the first year of a Labour Government. By the third year, Labour would have turned a budget surplus into a deficit of between £16 billion and £27 billion, and they have hardly even started.

As the election approaches, the shadow Chief Secretary will be submerged in a flood of spending promises to every conceivable pressure group to which the Labour party has never been able to say no. We would be back to the high spending, high taxation, Labour party of the past, and every Opposition Member knows it. Just about the most astonishing statement in the Opposition amendment today is that which calls upon the Government

"to prepare for the competitive challenges of the Single Market after 1992".

Astonishing, because, as the CBI recognised on many occasions recently, the 1980s has been the decade when the competitive position of British companies and the British economy have been so greatly improved. But even more astonishing because it was only comparatively recently —in June 1986—that the Leader of the Opposition said:

"The Single Market is an abdication of responsibility . . . an apology for action".

As in so much else, he has had to swallow his words and come closer to our policies, because time and again they have been proved right.

It was not many elections ago—in 1983, to be precise —that the Leader of the Opposition was still calling for British withdrawal from the European Community—complete withdrawal. There are rather too many recent converts in the Labour party among those who have spent a lifetime fighting British membership of the Community, and who now do not know what it is about. They have changed their minds not once or twice, but six times in the past few years.

No wonder the right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East blustered and flustered in reply to the question of my right hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. Howell) about the number of anti-European Labour Members. He was afraid to admit the figures, but I believe that Labour's Common Market safeguard committee claims to have the support of about one quarter of Labour Members.

By contrast, the vast majority of us on Conservative Benches are not only committed wholeheartedly to Britain's membership of, and full participation in, the European Community, but always have been. One of the first things that I did in politics was to propose a resolution at a university student conference urging the Government of the day to seek Britain's membership of the then Common Market. That was in the late 1950s, well before the Macmillan Government's first negotiation for entry. My commitment has remained complete ever since, in common with so many of my right hon. and hon. Friends, who took a similar view in their early life in politics.

That is why I so much agree with the comment of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in her Guildhall speech on Monday night, when she highlighted the breakthrough of the British and French tunnel deep below the channel as the really significant European news because it was "history in the making". She went on:

"As I have many times said, so much of our history has been in Europe and our destiny lies in Europe".

But equally, my experience of the day-to-day reality of Community negotiations—and I had four intense years of it—has always led me to distinguish between grand designs and great phrases, and the reality of building our common Community. And the reality is that, in the practical business of developing the plans and implementing the decisions, it is so often the United Kingdom that takes the lead and gets actual results.

It does need constantly to be said that, during my right hon. Friend's premiership the United Kingdom has been, and still is, in the lead in the implementation of the specific measures needed to bring into effect the single market programme. We have all put massive effort and commitment into that.

The United Kingdom played a leading part in getting the earlier reforms of the common agricultural policy through. As one who was involved in that, in the engine room, I can testify to the degree of commitment and knowledge that my right hon. Friend displayed. In the past few months and weeks, it was the United Kingdom that supported the Commission against French and German opposition in ensuring that we do now—very belatedly, indeed dangerously late—have a Community stance on agriculture in relation to the GATT Uruguay round. The United Kingdom developed the practical plans for the next stage of economic and monetary development.

Yes, we may have a tendency to cut through the waffle and get down to brass tacks, the practical work. But the Community is very often the better for it. As the right hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport, (Dr. Owen) said last week about the next stages of European monetary union:

"The detail is everything. It is a crime to hold out for the detail and to argue that those are fundamental questions? Of course it is not."—[*Official Report*, 7 November 1990; Vol. 180, c. 62.]

I agree, and this afternoon my right hon. Friend the Member for Cirencester and Tewkesbury (Mr. Ridley) also had some salutary words to say about the importance of getting the detail right.

Two other aspects of Community reality during my right hon. Friend's premiership need constant stressing. The first is that, as I have so constantly seen myself, every Minister stands up for national interests quite regularly —and some do that on points of detail, and some with

great obstinacy. We all understand that in the Community. We have seen one of the clearest examples in these past few weeks—not by Britain, but by France and Germany, in the agricultural discussions for the Uruguay round. It was the United Kingdom that was so clearly communautaire.

At the United Kingdom's instigation, the Commission and other member states are now paying much closer attention to the vital question of the implementation of single market legislation. The latest figures show that the United Kingdom has maintained its excellent record. We and Denmark remain in the lead. During the past decade, the United Kingdom has had the second best record, after Denmark, on the number of references to European Court of Justice.

I pay tribute to all that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East has done to further Britain's work in the Community. He has indeed played a leading part throughout, but I have to say that I simply do not believe that our European credentials are in doubt. I agree with him that our business people, our financiers, our young people and many others want us to play a full and constructive part. I believe that that is what we are doing. With my right hon. and hon. Friends, I intend to continue doing all that I can to see that the Community develops effectively and constructively.

I referred earlier to the spending trap that the Labour party is already getting into. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said this afternoon, that is in stark contrast with our record. By the end of this year, we expect to have repaid £29 billion-worth of public sector debt over four years, a saving of £2·75 billion in annual interest payments, giving us the strongest fiscal position of any G7 country apart from Japan. That is far from being the only way in which the policies of the past 10 years have strengthened Britain's economy. The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East mentioned employment. Employment in Britain is at its highest level ever. The work force has increased by 3·75 million in the past seven years. Some 71 per cent. of the United Kingdom's population is in employment. We are well ahead of the EC average—indeed, we have the second highest figure in the EC.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East mentioned capital investment. Private sector business investment has risen dramatically, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said. It went up by 45 per cent. over the three years to 1989 and it is expected to be high again this year—more than £57 million. When my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said that it is more than 50 per cent. higher than it was in 1979, I heard someone on the Opposition Front Bench mutter, as another has just done, "What about manufacturing investment?" I can tell Opposition Members that manufacturing investment in 1989 was up 9 per cent. on the previous year and reached its highest ever level.

Public sector capital investment will be £30 billion this year and there is a further £1·5 billion in the autumn statement. Private sector investment on training, which the right hon. and learned Gentleman went on about, amounts to more than £20 billion a year and the number of employers who are reporting recent training for their work force has gone up by 70 per cent. during the past five years. There is also a splendid response by employers to the training and enterprise councils.

The right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East continues to spew out rhetoric about investment and training, but the facts about Britain's recent performance refute utterly his charge. We are succeeding. We have been laying the basis for a sound and competitive economy in the 1990s.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey, North-West (Mr. Grylls) said, the enterprise ethic in Britain is now thoroughly re-established. The latest figures show a net increase in business—after losses—of about 1,700 a week, compared with 300 in 1980. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work in helping the small business movement. My right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford rightly said that there has been a substantial improvement in management performance.

We are witnessing a substantial change in the underlying strength of the British economy. That is the most important issue before the country tonight. It has been achieved by pursuing our policies during the past 10 years.

The Loyal Address is also about the major programme of legislation in the Queen's Speech, upon which we are about to embark. It is a full programme of work. As before, it does not identify all the measures that may be brought before Parliament. Indeed, seven which were not in the Queen's Speech have already been introduced. The main programme, however, is concentrated on carrying forward the continuing fight against crime, continuing to strengthen family responsibility, improving efficiency and safety in transport, carrying forward the privatisation programme, new pay negotiating machinery for teachers, new benefits for the disabled and a good deal more. All those issues are important and of great concern to our constituents, as we know from our constituency meetings, surgeries and postbags. I commend them, and our economic policies, to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 225, Noes 333.

Division No. 2] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Callaghan, Jim
Allen, Graham	Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Alton, David	Campbell-Savours, D. N.
Anderson, Donald	Canavan, Dennis
Archer, Rt Hon Peter	Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Armstrong, Hilary	Cartwright, John
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy	Clark, Dr David *(S Shields)*
Ashley, Rt Hon Jack	Clay, Bob
Ashton, Joe	Clelland, David
Banks, Tony *(Newham NW)*	Clwyd, Mrs Ann
Barnes, Harry *(Derbyshire NE)*	Coleman, Donald
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*	Cook, Robin *(Livingston)*
Barron, Kevin	Corbett, Robin
Battle, John	Corbyn, Jeremy
Beckett, Margaret	Cousins, Jim
Beith, A. J.	Cox, Tom
Bell, Stuart	Crowther, Stan
Bellotti, David	Cryer, Bob
Benn, Rt Hon Tony	Cummings, John
Bennett, A. F. *(D'nt'n & R'dish)*	Cunliffe, Lawrence
Benton, Joseph	Cunningham, Dr John
Bermingham, Gerald	Dalyell, Tam
Bidwell, Sydney	Darling, Alistair
Blair, Tony	Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Blunkett, David	Davies, Ron *(Caerphilly)*
Boateng, Paul	Davis, Terry *(B'ham Hodge H'l)*
Boyes, Roland	Dewar, Donald
Bradley, Keith	Dixon, Don
Bray, Dr Jeremy	Dobson, Frank
Brown, Gordon *(D'mline E)*	Doran, Frank
Brown, Nicholas *(Newcastle E)*	Duffy, A. E. P.
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*	Dunnachie, Jimmy
Buckley, George J.	Eadie, Alexander
Caborn, Richard	Evans, John *(St Helens N)*

Ewing, Harry *(Falkirk E)*
Field, Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flannery, Martin
Flynn, Paul
Foot, Rt Hon Michael
Foster, Derek
Foulkes, George
Fraser, John
Fyfe, Maria
Galbraith, Sam
Galloway, George
Garrett, John *(Norwich South)*
George, Bruce
Gilbert, Rt Hon Dr John
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mildred
Gould, Bryan
Graham, Thomas
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hardy, Peter
Harman, Ms Harriet
Hattersley, Rt Hon Roy
Heal, Mrs Sylvia
Healey, Rt Hon Denis
Henderson, Doug
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Ms Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hogg, N. *(C'nauld & Kilsyth)*
Home Robertson, John
Hood, Jimmy
Howell, Rt Hon D. *(S'heath)*
Howells, Geraint
Howells, Dr. Kim (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Doug
Hughes, John *(Coventry NE)*
Hughes, Robert *(Aberdeen N)*
Hughes, Roy *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Adam
Janner, Greville
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Barry *(Alyn & Deeside)*
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S W)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kennedy, Charles
Kinnock, Rt Hon Neil
Kirkwood, Archy
Lambie, David
Lamond, James
Leadbitter, Ted
Leighton, Ron
Lestor, Joan *(Eccles)*
Lewis, Terry
Litherland, Robert
Livingstone, Ken
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Stretford)*
Lofthouse, Geoffrey
Loyden, Eddie
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, Ian
Macdonald, Calum A.
McKay, Allen *(Barnsley West)*
McKelvey, William
McLeish, Henry
Maclennan, Robert
McNamara, Kevin
McWilliam, John
Madden, Max
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marek, Dr John
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martin, Michael J. *(Springburn)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Michael
Meale, Alan
Michael, Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffield Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Mitchell, Austin *(G't Grimsby)*
Morgan, Rhodri
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon A. *(W'shawe)*
Morris, Rt Hon J. *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Paul
Nellist, Dave
Oakes, Rt Hon Gordon
O'Brien, William
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Orme, Rt Hon Stanley
Parry, Robert
Patchett, Terry
Pendry, Tom
Pike, Peter L.
Powell, Ray *(Ogmore)*
Prescott, John
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Ms Joyce
Radice, Giles
Randall, Stuart
Rees, Rt Hon Merlyn
Reid, Dr John
Richardson, Jo
Robertson, George
Robinson, Geoffrey
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terence
Rowlands, Ted
Salmond, Alex
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shore, Rt Hon Peter
Short, Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, C. *(Isl'ton & F'bury)*
Smith, Rt Hon J. *(Monk'ds E)*
Smith, J. P. *(Vale of Glam)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spearing, Nigel
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Steinberg, Gerry
Stott, Roger
Strang, Gavin
Straw, Jack
Taylor, Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis
Thompson, Jack *(Wansbeck)*
Turner, Dennis
Vaz, Keith
Wallace, James
Walley, Joan
Wardell, Gareth *(Gower)*
Wareing, Robert N.
Welsh, Andrew *(Angus E)*
Welsh, Michael *(Doncaster N)*
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Williams, Alan W. *(Carm'then)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Wise, Mrs Audrey
Wray, Jimmy
Young, David *(Bolton SE)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Frank Haynes and
Mr. Ken Eastham.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Benyon, W.
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Bonsor, Sir Nicholas
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Budgen, Nicholas
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Staml'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dickens, Geoffrey
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David
Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Gilmour, Rt Hon Sir Ian
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*

Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Lee, John *(Pendle)*
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Sir Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marlow, Tony
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'ffampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moss, Malcolm
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Ridsdale, Sir Julian
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir George Young and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 32 (Calling of amendments at end of debate), at the end of the Question to add:

But humbly regret the absence from the Gracious Speech of any coherent policy to secure for the people of the United Kingdom the benefits of the economic, monetary and political union of the European Community.—*[Mr. Beith.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 20, Noes 323.

Division No. 3] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Alton, David
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Barnes, Mrs Rosie *(Greenwich)*
Beith, A. J.
Bellotti, David
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Campbell, Menzies *(Fife NE)*
Cartwright, John
Howells, Geraint
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark)*
Johnston, Sir Russell
Jones, Ieuan *(Ynys Môn)*
Kennedy, Charles
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
Maclennan, Robert
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Arg'l & Bute)*
Steel, Rt Hon Sir David
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Dr Dafydd Elis

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Wallace and
Mr. Alex Carlile.

NOES

Adley, Robert
Aitken, Jonathan
Alexander, Richard
Alison, Rt Hon Michael
Allason, Rupert
Amery, Rt Hon Julian
Amess, David
Amos, Alan
Arbuthnot, James
Arnold, Jacques *(Gravesham)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas
Ashby, David
Aspinwall, Jack
Atkins, Robert
Atkinson, David
Baker, Rt Hon K. *(Mole Valley)*
Baker, Nicholas *(Dorset N)*
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Robert *(Harrogate)*
Batiste, Spencer
Beaumont-Dark, Anthony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bendall, Vivian
Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Bevan, David Gilroy
Biffen, Rt Hon John
Blackburn, Dr John G.
Blaker, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Body, Sir Richard
Boscawen, Hon Robert
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter
Bottomley, Mrs Virginia
Bowden, A *(Brighton K'pto'n)*
Bowden, Gerald *(Dulwich)*
Bowis, John
Boyson, Rt Hon Dr Sir Rhodes
Braine, Rt Hon Sir Bernard
Brandon-Bravo, Martin
Brazier, Julian
Bright, Graham
Brown, Michael *(Brigg & Cl't's)*
Bruce, Ian *(Dorset South)*
Buchanan-Smith, Rt Hon Alick
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butler, Chris
Butterfill, John
Carlisle, Kenneth *(Lincoln)*
Carrington, Matthew
Carttiss, Michael
Cash, William
Channon, Rt Hon Paul
Chope, Christopher
Churchill, Mr
Clark, Hon Alan *(Plym'th S'n)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rochford)*
Clark, Sir W. *(Croydon S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Colvin, Michael
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Anthony *(Wyre F'rest)*
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Cormack, Patrick
Couchman, James
Cran, James
Currie, Mrs Edwina
Davies, Q. *(Stamf'd & Spald'g)*
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Day, Stephen
Devlin, Tim
Dorrell, Stephen
Douglas-Hamilton, Lord James
Dover, Den
Dunn, Bob
Durant, Tony
Dykes, Hugh
Eggar, Tim
Emery, Sir Peter
Evans, David *(Welwyn Hatf'd)*
Evennett, David

Fenner, Dame Peggy
Field, Barry *(Isle of Wight)*
Fishburn, John Dudley
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forman, Nigel
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Forsythe, Clifford *(Antrim S)*
Forth, Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Sir Marcus
Franks, Cecil
Freeman, Roger
French, Douglas
Fry, Peter
Gale, Roger
Gardiner, George
Garel-Jones, Tristan
Gill, Christopher
Glyn, Dr Sir Alan
Goodhart, Sir Philip
Goodlad, Alastair
Goodson-Wickes, Dr Charles
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gorst, John
Grant, Sir Anthony *(CambsSW)*
Greenway, Harry *(Ealing N)*
Greenway, John *(Ryedale)*
Gregory, Conal
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Grist, Ian
Ground, Patrick
Grylls, Michael
Gummer, Rt Hon John Selwyn
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hampson, Dr Keith
Hargreaves, A. *(B'ham H'll Gr')*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Haselhurst, Alan
Hawkins, Christopher
Hayes, Jerry
Hayhoe, Rt Hon Sir Barney
Hayward, Robert
Heath, Rt Hon Edward
Heathcoat-Amory, David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hicks, Mrs Maureen *(Wolv' NE)*
Hicks, Robert *(Cornwall SE)*
Higgins, Rt Hon Terence L.
Hill, James
Hind, Kenneth
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Alan *(Strat'd-on-A)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Howell, Rt Hon David *(G'dford)*
Howell, Ralph *(North Norfolk)*
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunt, Sir John *(Ravensbourne)*
Hunter, Andrew
Irvine, Michael
Irving, Sir Charles
Jack, Michael
Jackson, Robert
Janman, Tim
Jessel, Toby
Johnson Smith, Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Robert B *(Herts W)*
Jopling, Rt Hon Michael
Kellett-Bowman, Dame Elaine
Key, Robert
Kilfedder, James
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knight, Dame Jill *(Edgbaston)*
Knowles, Michael
Knox, David
Lamont, Rt Hon Norman
Lang, Ian
Latham, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lawson, Rt Hon Nigel
Leigh, Edward *(Gainsbor'gh)*
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Lester, Jim *(Broxtowe)*
Lilley, Peter
Lloyd, Sir Ian *(Havant)*
Lloyd, Peter *(Fareham)*
Luce, Rt Hon Richard
McCrindle, Robert
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Andrew *(E Berkshire)*
Maclean, David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNair-Wilson, Sir Patrick
Madel, David
Maginnis, Ken
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mans, Keith
Marland, Paul
Marshall, John *(Hendon S)*
Martin, David *(Portsmouth S)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Dr Brian
Maxwell-Hyslop, Robin
Mayhew, Rt Hon Sir Patrick
Mellor, David
Meyer, Sir Anthony
Miller, Sir Hal
Mills, Iain
Miscampbell, Norman
Mitchell, Andrew *(Gedling)*
Mitchell, Sir David
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Monro, Sir Hector
Montgomery, Sir Fergus
Morris, M *(N'hampton S)*
Morrison, Sir Charles
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Moynihan, Hon Colin
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Needham, Richard
Neubert, Michael
Newton, Rt Hon Tony
Nicholls, Patrick
Nicholson, David *(Taunton)*
Nicholson, Emma *(Devon West)*
Norris, Steve
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Oppenheim, Phillip
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Parkinson, Rt Hon Cecil
Patnick, Irvine
Patten, Rt Hon John
Pattie, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Pawsey, James
Peacock, Mrs Elizabeth
Porter, Barry *(Wirral S)*
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Portillo, Michael
Powell, William *(Corby)*
Price, Sir David
Raffan, Keith
Raison, Rt Hon Timothy
Redwood, John
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Rhodes James, Robert
Riddick, Graham
Ridley, Rt Hon Nicholas
Rifkind, Rt Hon Malcolm
Roberts, Sir Wyn *(Conwy)*
Ross, William *(Londonderry E)*
Rossi, Sir Hugh
Rost, Peter
Rumbold, Mrs Angela
Ryder, Richard
Sackville, Hon Tom
Sayeed, Jonathan
Scott, Rt Hon Nicholas
Shaw, David *(Dover)*
Shaw, Sir Giles *(Pudsey)*
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Shephard, Mrs G. *(Norfolk SW)*
Shepherd, Colin *(Hereford)*
Shepherd, Richard *(Aldridge)*
Shersby, Michael
Sims, Roger
Skeet, Sir Trevor
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Dudley *(Warwick)*
Soames, Hon Nicholas
Speed, Keith
Speller, Tony
Spicer, Sir Jim *(Dorset W)*
Spicer, Michael *(S Worcs)*
Squire, Robin
Stanbrook, Ivor
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stern, Michael
Stevens, Lewis
Stewart, Allan *(Eastwood)*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Stewart, Rt Hon Ian *(Herts N)*
Stokes, Sir John
Sumberg, David
Summerson, Hugo
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Teddy *(S'end E)*
Tebbit, Rt Hon Norman
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thatcher, Rt Hon Margaret
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Thompson, Patrick *(Norwich N)*
Thorne, Neil
Thornton, Malcolm
Thurnham, Peter
Townend, John *(Bridlington)*
Townsend, Cyril D. *(B'heath)*
Tracey, Richard
Tredinnick, David
Trippier, David
Trotter, Neville
Twinn, Dr Ian
Vaughan, Sir Gerard
Viggers, Peter
Waddington, Rt Hon David
Wakeham, Rt Hon John
Waldegrave, Rt Hon William
Walden, George
Walker, Bill *(T'side North)*
Walker, Rt Hon P. *(W'cester)*
Waller, Gary
Walters, Sir Dennis
Wardle, Charles *(Bexhill)*
Warren, Kenneth
Watts, John
Wells, Bowen
Wheeler, Sir John
Whitney, Ray
Widdecombe, Ann
Wiggin, Jerry
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Wolfson, Mark
Wood, Timothy
Woodcock, Dr. Mike
Yeo, Tim
Younger, Rt Hon George

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir George Young and
Mr. David Lightbown.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

To be presented by Privy Councillors or Members of Her Majesty's Household.

PETITIONS

Mining (Antarctica)

10.29 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I wish to present a petition from my constituents, who are alarmed that the Government are supporting a treaty which will allow mining in the Antarctic. They believe that the Antarctic is the last great wilderness left on earth and it should be kept that way. It is the one place on earth free from commercial development. I agree wholeheartedly with them and I am very proud to present the petition on their behalf.

To lie upon the Table.

Health Services (Devon)

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark and Bermondsey): I have been asked by my Liberal Democrat colleagues in north Devon to present a petition of nearly 6,000 people which was collected more widely in Devon in opposition to the current proposal for the local health service to opt out as a self-governing NHS trust. I do this in the place of my colleague who is our health spokesman. I present the petition in that capacity and I hope that it will be taken fully into account when the deliberations take place in the office of the Secretary of State for Health in the next few days.

To lie upon the Table.

Post Office (Burslem)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.].*

10.30 pm

Ms. Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I am particularly grateful for the opportunity to raise in this Adjournment debate the issue of Burslem post office and the Post Office Counters Ltd. proposal to downgrade that post office. Only last night, the leader of the city of Stoke-on-Trent collected an "England for Excellence" award from the English Tourist Board. It is remarkable that the city has won that award. That is good news for Stoke-on-Trent and for tourism and it has a great deal to do with this Adjournment debate about the proposed closure of Burslem post office.

Burslem is the mother town of the Potteries, with the greatest concentration of historic buildings, and the only one of the six towns whose entire centre is a designated conservation area. Not everyone knows about the Potteries. *[Interruption.]* I have just heard Conservative Members referring to Arnold Bennett. Were he living today, he would no doubt be writing in great detail in journals and novels about the history of Burslem—or Bursley, as he referred to it. I am sure that he would refer in great detail to the ridiculous and unbelievable proposals by the Post Office to downgrade the purpose-built Crown post office located in the centre of Burslem.

Those who are not familiar with the work of Arnold Bennett and those who have not visited Burslem should be aware that many poeple visit Burslem via the canals. Hundreds of thousands of visitors come from all over the world to visit the mother town of the pottery industry. They come from America and all over. The fact that Stoke-on-Trent city council won that major tourism award shows that we intend to bring even more people to Burslem, but that will not happen if the Government have their way and allow Post Office Counters Ltd. to downgrade our purpose-built Crown post office.

Burslem may be the best of the pottery towns, and we are very parochial in Stoke-on-Trent, but it must be said that of late Burslem has become a run-down town. Many shops in the centre have closed down and industry in the centre of the town is having great difficulty, not least because of the Government's economic policies. Despite that, however, the city council is doing all that it can to revitalise the area, in close co-operation with local residents, local councillors, the local chamber of commerce, local industry and everyone with a legitimate interest in Burslem. That is being done in close co-operation with the Civic Trust, which to its credit has chosen to work with us in Burslem in much the same way as it has worked with other major cities, such as Halifax where the work has resulted in a major revitalisation.

I am not sure whether the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Corporate Affairs should reply to this debate—perhaps he oversees post offices—or whether it should be a Minister from the Department of the Environment who oversees the revitalisation of inner-city areas. Either way, it makes no difference, because the issue is what the Government intend to do to assist inner-city areas such as Burslem and a Minister from either Department should make sure that his colleagues in other Departments know of the needs of Burslem.

[Ms. Joan Walley]

Some of the successes of Stoke-on-Trent city council include its commitment to a rolling programme of £50,000 per annum to be invested in the regeneration of Burslem over the next five years. That has the full support of Staffordshire county council. The city council has consulted some 70 local organisations about a local draft plan which is going full speed ahead with the full co-operation of the Civic Trust. Part of that includes plans to go ahead with the St. John's square lighting scheme for one of the principal public places in the town centre.

The city council is holding a major survey of the old town hall, which is a grade 2 listed building, and its work to increase the leisure activities will be a major asset to the town. It is going ahead with the Waterloo road face-lift scheme, at a cost of about £71,000 in phase 1 and £63,000 in phase 2. It is also acutely aware of the problem of car parking and has a project for the Nicholas street community car park.

Cultural activities add to the quality of life. I am thinking particularly of the Burslem road race and the Potteries folk festival which we may develop even further in view of the increasing emphasis on tourism. We have a continuing strategy to work towards re-establishing an open market in the centre of town. Work has already commenced on a by-pass which will take traffic out of the town centre. There is a major investment of about £200,000 by Staffordshire county council in the Burslem enterprise centre. Up to 40 units will be created once it is completed. I have the fullest regard for the work of my colleague, councillor Mike Tappin, in that respect.

The city council has plans to work jointly with English Heritage and its historic buildings fund. Royal Doulton, a key industry in Burslem, has selected a site in front of the old town hall to erect the Sir Henry Doulton statue. The magnificent old town hall and Queen's theatre complex is about to be revamped and again key money will be spent on making it a centre for cultural activities of one kind or another. Just down the road we have started to build the northern area leisure centre. Clearly a great deal is happening in Burslem.

In this key town in the very centre of the Potteries is the purpose-built Crown post office erected in 1937. Over the years, the post office staff have provided an important service to our local community. Every resident and everyone connected with Burslem in any way wants the post office to remain in the purpose-built building, providing the service that its trained staff have performed so carefully over the years.

In the midst of all that, the Post Office delivers a body blow to Burslem. There has been no recognition from the Commission, the Department of the Environment or the Government generally of the real need to revitalise Burslem. They have rejected all our attempts—every effort that we have made—to get special inner-city status for Burslem. We have not had the help which the Government say that they are giving to inner-city areas such as Burslem. We have not had the help which it was suggested in the Queen's Speech that the Government would give to inner-city areas. Instead, the Government are standing over the counter services of post offices and suggesting that Crown post offices can be downgraded. It is a body blow for Burslem and we do not wish to see the downgrading take place.

The Post Office has refused to have any genuine consultation procedure for its plans and future proposals for the Crown post office at Burslem. The problem is not confined to Burslem. In north Staffordshire—at Kidsgrove, in my constituency—there has been a similar proposal, as there has at Stone, which has been met by a vigorous campaign. It is important to put the proposals into a national context and to recognise that it is proposed to downgrade 380 Crown post offices. Burslem is not alone.

Given the joint partnership scheme that we have with the Civic Trust and the unique consultation exercise that the city of Stoke-on-Trent has undertaken in Burslem, it is not for the Post Office to say that the post office must be downgraded. We do not even have an assurance that the service will be continued in the purpose-built building. The letter that I received from Mr. Grey, who has been responsible for the Post Office's plans, suggests that he will be looking for other accommodation in the town. It is unacceptable that our assets should be sold off, or got rid of, to enable the Post Office to run a service elsewhere. The Government are not providing a subsidy for an important local service and everything is being done at Burslem's expense. Main post offices have served the local community diligently for many years. They have provided a professional, courteous and confidential service. I say to all those involved with the communication workers that we support the work that they are doing.

As I have said, the consultation exercise on which the Post Office has embarked has been a sham. When there were rumours that the Post Office would seek to downgrade the Crown post office at Burslem, I at once contacted the Post Office and Mr. Grey. Public meetings were organised immediately in Burslem, and I organised a meeting with Mr. Grey. He said that it was pure speculation and that there was no intention on the Post Office's part to consider either the closure or downgrading of Burslem Crown post office.

Extensive details have been given as to why the downgrading should not take place at this time. The Civic Trust remains as committed as I am, and as local residents and the city council are, to ensuring that the post office retains its Crown status in its purpose-built building. The debate provides an opportunity to ask the Government exactly what help they are prepared to give. Will the Post Office ride roughshod over local people in each and every one of the 380 towns where the consultation procedure is taking place? When the consultation procedure ends, will it say, "The Post Office has not really listened to what you have said and has not taken into account all the work that the city council and the Civic Trust have done; we shall downgrade the Crown post office and the service can go to any other building"? That will undermine every initiative that the city council, with the support of the entire community, is taking in Burslem.

I welcome the opportunity to hear from the Minister exactly how he intends to ensure that, at least in Burslem, the Post Office undertakes a proper consultation exercise, listens to local people and allows us to keep our Crown post office in the building specially built for it in the centre of Burslem.

The one message that I want to get across today is that just as this is the mother of Parliaments, Burslem is the mother town of the Potteries and in no circumstances do we want our post office downgraded.

10.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Industry and Consumer Affairs (Mr. Edward Leigh): I am delighted to have this opportunity to reply to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms. Walley). I congratulate her on drawing a place in the ballot and also on being a fine ambassador for Stoke-on-Trent. It did not surprise me that, when my hon. Friend the Member for Dorset, North (Mr. Baker) made a literary allusion, the hon. Lady was quick off the mark and topped it with one of her own.

I am delighted to be supported by my hon. Friends this evening. I am not sure whether you, Mr. Speaker, are aware that this is the first time that I have had the opportunity to speak from the Dispatch Box.

Mr. Speaker: That is why I am here.

Mr. Leigh: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): It is the first of many speeches.

Mr. Leigh: I hope that it will be the first of many.

The debate gives me an opportunity to explain Government policy in two areas about which we feel strongly and to which we are entirely committed—urban regeneration and the provision of efficient post office services. I shall start with urban regeneration because the hon. Lady dealt with that at some length. We wish to establish a climate of enterprise led by industry and commerce, which will lead to a lasting revival in our inner-city areas. We believe that that primarily depends on the effective working of the market. However, the Government recognise the need for effective Government assistance to those areas that traditionally have faced difficulties. This is contrary to the impression given by the hon. Lady. The Government have committed up to £4 billion in their action for cities programme. It is a record of which the Government can be proud, and it shows our commitment to the area.

Ms. Walley: Had I realised that this was the first time that the Minister had appeared at the Dispatch Box, I too would have added my congratulations. Can he tell us exactly how much money has been allocated to Stoke-on-Trent?

Mr. Leigh: I am delighted to answer the hon. Lady. During recent years, Stoke-on-Trent has benefited from substantial aid under the Government's inner-city programmes. For example, since 1979-80, more than £14 million has been paid in derelict land grant to assist with the cost of land reclamation. The Government are aware of the problems and are committed to helping.

It must be said that inner-city regeneration is not just a job for the Government. It is being achieved through the joint efforts of many organisations and individuals who have a stake in the future of our inner cities. Local problems will benefit most from a local approach. The project to which the hon. Lady referred is an example involving the local authority, voluntary organisations and the private sector in action to conserve and improve an historic centre. The House listened with care to what the hon. Lady said about the historic nature of the centre of Burslem and sympathised with her point of view.

The hon. Lady drew attention to the place of Burslem main post office in the regeneration of the town. In the short time available, I shall try to explain the Government's position on the post office, and especially their position on counter services. Post Office Counters Ltd. was incorporated in 1987 and is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Post Office. Since then, it has made a small operating profit on its turnover of £875 million.

Conservative Members can be proud of the Government's record in turning this part of the Post Office service into a profitable enterprise, especially as Post Office services are increasingly becoming subject to competition. Automated funds transferred directly into bank and building society accounts provide an alternative means of delivering pension and benefit payments and for the payment of bills.

Stamps—an interesting point of which I was not aware until this week when I started to take a particular interest in these matters—are now sold in some 40,000 other retail outlets. That is the kind of competition that the Post Office is facing and meeting, and on which it is moving from success to success.

Another interesting point of which hon. Members may not be aware is that the Post Office has a network of more than 20,000 post offices throughout the United Kingdom. That is considerably more than any bank or building society, and it is worth pointing out that it is more per head of population than in France, Germany, Japan or the United States.

In urban areas, our aim is to have nothing less than offices distributed in sufficient numbers so that no one is more than one mile from a post office, and in rural areas no more than two miles. In the United Kingdom, post offices are, rightly, easily accessible to all except those in the remotest areas. Therefore, we have made clear our commitment to the Post Office and I am more than happy to do so again today. It is also important that I make it clear that we are committed to having a post office network adequate to fulfil its statutory duties. I also know that the Post Office has made clear its own commitment to the maintenance of its network.

The hon. Lady dealt at some length with what she took to be a downgrading from Crown status to agency status, so in the few minutes available to me, let me reply to that point.

We must not forget that it has always been the case that only a small proportion of post offices, now some 1,300 out of more than 20,000, are directly owned and operated as Crown post offices by Post Office Counters. Sub post offices have always formed the vast majority of the network, and there are at present about 19,300. These are franchised by Post Office Counters to self-employed agents, sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses, the great majority of whom operate a private business alongside their post office counters.

That arrangement has worked well and brings benefits to both parties. The post office brings in a nucleus of business from regular customers who buy stamps, post parcels and collect benefits and pensions, which provide potential customers for the sub-postmaster or mistress's private business. The range of private businesses is wide, including general stores, confectioners and newsagents.

The important point which was not made by the hon. Lady, is that overhead costs are shared between the two businesses. Sub and agency offices can therefore have significant advantages over the directly run Crown offices, because the shared overheads make them generally less expensive to run.

[Mr. Leigh]

That was recognised by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission in its 1988 report on the provision of counter services at Crown post offices. The report noted that, at the time, the unit costs of Crown offices could be 60 to 100 per cent. higher than those of sub offices, and it endorsed Post Office Counters' plans to convert Crown offices to agency offices.

Those conversions are part of a process, which began in 1988, of restructuring the post office network to give a more cost-effective service and, like any other retail network, to respond to movements in population.

The hon. Lady made some unpleasant remarks about downgrading. What she said was an insult to the thousands of sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses who provide an excellent service, which has been recognised as such by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and of which we should be proud.

Ms. Walley: Does the Minister accept that there is a problem with security, that there has been an increase in attacks on premises which have not been purpose-built and that one asset of the Crown post office is that extra security is built into its design? Does the Minister further accept that, if a Crown post office were to be downgraded, the people there would be made more vulnerable?

Mr. Leigh: We are determined to ensure that will not happen, and no doubt the Post Office will take full account of that aspect in the consultation process.

The hon. Lady implied that an agency post office will be less efficient than a Crown office, but there is no evidence to support that suggestion. Exactly the same services are provided by an agency office as by a Crown office. If only one thing comes out of this debate, I hope that at least that is now clear.

As to the people of Burslem—the House is concerned with the provision of services to the public, not just with status—they will receive exactly the same service as they did before.

Mrs. Teresa Gorman (Billericay): A better service.

Mr. Leigh: If not a better service, as my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman) says.

Despite my confidence in the proposals, because of the place of the post office in a local community, changes to the network require careful consultation. I give the hon. Lady an assurance that we are insistent that such consultation will take place. I understand that Post Office Counters is currently consulting local interested parties about its proposals for the conversion of Burslem post office to agency status. No final decisions will be taken until that process is completed in December. No doubt the hon. Lady will make her views known to the Post Office directly, but if it helps, I shall ensure that tonight's debate is brought to the attention of the chairman of the Post Office.

However, it would not be appropriate for me to intervene in the consultation process or in the final decision. Decisions about the day-to-day running of Post Office business, such as the type and level of service provision in particular areas, are for the Post Office board. The Government's role is rightly confined to broad issues of general policy and overall financial control.

Nevertheless, I shall make a general point about conversions. It is wrong to suggest that Crown offices are in some way intrinsically superior to agency offices. They are not. I cannot stress that enough.

Despite the competition that it faces, Post Office Counters has been able to maintain its business, by improving efficiency and competitiveness. At present, we see no reason to embrace the strategy of managed decline that was suggested in the Monopolies and Mergers Commission's recent report on counter services. We are fully committed to maintaining a network adequate to enable the Post Office to fulfil its statutory duties.

As I said, converted offices will continue to offer all the services available at the Crown offices that they replace, together with the flexibility of the sub-postmaster to offer non-Post Office business. We heard nothing on that aspect from the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North. We have a scheme to ensure that all existing services are provided, and at the same time the public will be able to profit and benefit from all the other services offered as part of the business.

Local offices are required to meet quality service standards set by the Post Office, and we recognise the vital role that they play as a focus of the community, as well as in delivering a service. Although business volume has remained more or less static in recent years, Post Office Counters performed well—meeting both its profit and cost reduction targets. We hope and expect that it will continue to operate successfully.

I am delighted to have this first opportunity to speak at the Dispatch Box, and I apologise if my delivery has been somewhat halting—but it has been a rather nerve-wracking experience. I am delighted to be able to emphasise the total commitment that this Government have to a successful and vibrant Post Office network that will meet the demands of the public right into the next century.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 15 November 1990

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MOTIONS FOR UNOPPOSED RETURNS

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Return ordered,

for Session 1989-90 of—

(1) the total number of Questions to Ministers or other Members which stood on the Order Paper, distinguishing those set down for oral, written priority and written answer respectively, the number of days upon which replies to Questions for oral answers were given in the House; and the total number of Questions for oral answer to which such answers were given in the House;

(2) the total number of Notices of Motions given for an early day;

(3) the number of Members ordered to withdraw from the House under Standing Order No. 42 (Disorderly conduct), showing separately the orders given in the House and those given in Committee; and the Members suspended from the service of the House under Standing Order No. 43 (Order in debate) or otherwise, distinguishing whether the offence was committed in the House or in Committee, the period of such suspension, the number of occasions on which more than one Member was so suspended having jointly disregarded the authority of the Chair, and the number of occasions on which the attention of the House was called to the need for recourse to force to compel obedience to Mr. Speaker's direction; and

(4) the number of public petitions presented to the House distinguishing separately those brought to the Table at the times specified by Standing Order No.133 (No debate on presentation of petition).—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

CLOSURE AND ALLOCATION OF TIME

Return ordered,

for Session 1989-90 respecting—

(A) applications of Standing Order No. 35 (Closure of debate) during Session 1989-90:

(1) in the House and in Committee of the whole House, under the following heads:

1	2	3	4	5	6
Date when Closure claimed, and by whom	Question before House or Committee when claimed	Whether in House or Committee	Whether assent given to Motion or withheld by the Chair	Assent withheld because, in the opinion of the Chair, a decision would shortly be arrived at without that Motion	Result of Motion and, if a Division, Numbers for and against

and

(2) in the Standing Committees under the following heads:

1	2	3	4	5
Date when Closure claimed, and by whom	Question before Committee when claimed	Whether assent given to Motion or withheld by the Chair	Assent withheld because, in the opinion of the Chair, a decision would shortly be arrived at without that Motion	Result of Motion and, if a Division, Numbers for and against

and

(B) applications of Standing Order No. 28 (Powers of Chair to propose question) during Session 1989-90:

(1) in the House and in Committee of the whole House, under the following heads:

1	2	3	4	5
Date when Closure claimed, and by whom	Whether in House or Committee	Whether claimed in respect of Motion or Amendment	Whether assent given to Motion or withheld by the Chair	Result of Motion, and, if a Division, Numbers for and against

and

(2) in the Standing Committees under the following heads:

1	2	3	4
Date when Closure claimed, and by whom	Whether claimed in respect of Motion or Amendment	Whether assent given to Motion or withheld by the Chair	Result of Motion, and, if a Division, Numbers for and against

and

(C) the number of Bills in respect of which allocation of time orders (distinguishing where appropriate orders supplementary to a previous order) were made under Standing Order No. 81 (Allocation of time to Bills), showing in respect of each Bill—

(i) the number of sittings allotted to the consideration of the Bill in Standing Committee by any report of a Business Sub-Committee under Standing Order No. 103 (Business sub-committees) agreed to by the Standing Committee, and the number of sittings of the Standing Committee pursuant thereto; and

(ii) the number of days or portions of days allotted by the allocation of time order and any supplementary order to the consideration of the Bill at any stage in the House or in committee, together with the number of days upon which proceedings were so taken in the House or in committee.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Return ordered,

or Session 1989-90 of the number of Instruments considered by the Joint Committee and the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments respectively pursuant to their orders of reference, showing in each case the numbers of Instruments subject to the different forms of parliamentary procedure and of those within the Committees' orders of reference for which no parliamentary procedure is prescribed by statute; setting out the grounds on which Instruments may be drawn to the special attention of the House under Standing Order No. 124

(Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee)) and specifying the number of Instruments so reported under each of these grounds; and of the numbers of Instruments considered by a Standing Committee on Statutory Instruments, &c., and by the House respectively, showing the number where the Question on the proceedings relating thereto was put forthwith under Standing Order No. 101(5).—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Private Bills and Private Business

Return ordered,

for Session 1989-90 of

(1) The Number of Private Bills, Hybrid Bills, Bills for the confirmation of Orders under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, and Bills for confirming Provisional Orders introduced into this House, and brought from the House of Lords, and of Acts passed, specifying also the dates of the House's consideration of the several stages of such Bills;

(2) All Private Bills, Hybrid Bills and Bills for confirming Provisional Orders which were reported on by Committees on Opposed Bills or by Committees nominated by the House or partly by the House and partly by the Committee of Selection, together with the names of the selected Members who served on each Committee; the first and also the last day of the sitting of each Committee; the number of days on which each Committee sat; the number of days on which each selected Member served; the number of days occupied by each Bill in Committee; the Bills of which the Preambles were reported to have been proved; the Bills of which the Preambles were reported to have been not proved; and in the case of Bills for confirming Provisional Orders, whether the Provisional Order ought or ought not to be confirmed;

(3) All Private Bills and Bills for confirming Provisional Orders which were referred by the Committee of Selection to the Committee on Unopposed Bills, together with the names of the Members who served on the Committee; the number of days on which the Committee sat; and the number of days on which each Member attended;

(4) The number of Bills to confirm Orders under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, distinguishing those proceeded with under section 7 and under section 9 respectively; specifying, in the case of Bills proceeded with under section 9 against which petitions were deposited, whether a motion was made to refer the Bill to a joint committee, and if so whether such motion was agreed to, withdrawn, negatived or otherwise disposed of; and stating for each joint committee to which a Bill was referred the names of the Members of this House nominated thereto, the first and last day of the committee's sitting, the number of days on which each joint committee sat for the consideration of the Bill referred to it, the number of days on which each Member of the committee served, and whether the committee reported that the order ought or ought not to be confirmed;

(5) The number of Private Bills, Hybrid Bills, Bills for the confirmation of Orders under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936, and Bills for confirming Provisional Orders withdrawn or not proceeded with by the parties, those Bills being specified which were referred to Committees and dropped during the sittings of the committee; and

(6) The membership, work costs and staff of the Court of Referees and the Standing Orders Committee.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Public Bills

Return ordered,

for Session 1989-90 of the number of Public Bills (other than Bills to confirm Provisional Orders and Bills to confirm Orders under the Private Legislation Procedure (Scotland) Act 1936) distinguishing Government from other Bills, introduced into this House, or brought from the House of Lords, showing: (1) the number which received the Royal Assent, and (2) the number which did not receive the Royal Assent, indicating those which were introduced into but not passed by this House, those passed by this House but not by the House of Lords, those passed by the House of Lords but not by this House, those passed by both Houses but Amendments not agreed to; and distinguishing the stages at which such Bills were dropped, postponed or rejected in either House of Parliament, or the stages which such Bills had reached by the time of Prorogation.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Sittings of the House

Return ordered,

for Session 1989-90 of the days on which the House sat; stating for each day the day of the month and day of the week, the hour of the meeting, and the hour of the adjournment; the total numbers of hours occupied in the sittings of the House; and the average time; showing the number of hours on which the House sat each day and the number of hours after the time appointed for the interruption of business; and specifying, for each principal type of business before the House, how much time was spent thereon, distinguishing from the total the time spent after the hour appointed for the interruption of business.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Special Procedure Orders

Return ordered,

for Session 1989-90 of

(1) The number of Special Procedure Orders presented, the number withdrawn; the number annulled; the number against which Petitions or copies of Petitions were deposited; the number of Petitions of General Objection and for Amendment respectively considered by the Chairmen; the number of such petitions certified by the Chairmen as proper to be received and the number certified by them as being Petitions of General Objection and for Amendment respectively; the number referred to a Joint Committee of both Houses; the number reported with Amendments by a Joint Committee, and the number in relation to which a Joint Committee reported that the Order be not approved and be amended respectively; and the number of Bills introduced for the confirmation of Special Procedure Orders: and

(2) Special Procedure Orders which were referred to a joint Committee, together with the names of the Commons Members who served on each Committee; the number of days on which each committee sat; and the number of days on which each such Member attended.—*[The First Deputy chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Standing Committees

Return ordered,

for Session 1989-90 of

(1) the total number and the names of all Members (including and distinguishing Chairmen) who have been appointed to serve on one or more of the Standing Committees showing, with regard to each of such Members, the number of sittings to which he was summoned and at which he was present;

(2) the number of Bills, Estimates, Matters and other items referred to Standing Committees pursuant to Standing Order No. 102 (Standing Committees on Statutory Instruments, &c.), or Standing Order No. 103 (Standing Committees on European Community Documents) considered by all and by each of the Standing Committees, the number of sittings of each Committee and the titles of all Bills, Estimates, Matters and other items as above considered by a Committee, distinguishing where a Bill was a Government Bill or was brought from the House of Lords, and showing in the case of each Bill, Estimate, Matter and other item, the particular Committee by which it was considered, the number of sittings at which it was considered (including, in the case of the Scottish Grand Committee, the number of Meetings held in Edinburgh, pursuant to a motion made under Standing Order No. 95(3) (Scottish Grand Committee)) and the number of Members present at each of those sittings; and

(3) the membership, work costs and staff of the Chairmen's Panel.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Select Committees

Return ordered,

for Session 1989-90 of statistics relating to the membership, work costs and staff of Select Committees (other than the Standing Orders Committee).—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

Free Television Licences

1. **Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Government policy towards the provision of free television licences for pensioners.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Peter Lloyd): We have no plans to introduce free licences for pensioners or to extend the present concessionary arrangements.

Mr. Winnick: Although the licence fee is excellent value and far better than any alternative scheme, is the Minister aware of the strong feeling of many pensioners that they should not have to pay the full sum? Is he also aware that two thirds of pensioner households are on low incomes? Why do the Government give every concession to the rich, but deny poor pensioners the concession for which Labour Members ask? Is it any wonder that the Government are so detested?

Mr. Lloyd: I wonder whether the hon. Member would think it fair, when many pensioners are well off and many non-pensioners have low incomes, for £435 million which would otherwise go to the BBC to be spent in that way, with the result that low-income families would have to pay 50 per cent. more for their licences, up to £107. Is that fair?

Dame Jill Knight: Does my hon. Friend agree that if the suggestion of the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) were followed, hundreds of thousands of extremely wealthy people over the ages of 60 and 65 would get handouts from the taxpayer and that if any Government were to subsidise pleasure we should be on a slippery slope?

Mr. Lloyd: I agree with my hon. Friend and so, I believe, does the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, Central (Mr. Fisher). I regret that the hon. Gentleman is not in his place. He made it clear in a letter to *The Guardian* that there was no question of exempting pensioners who were able to pay. My hon. Friend is right to say that if money is available it should be used for projects which benefit the lower paid and are targeted on them. That is why, in October last, we increased the pensioner addition to income support by £200 million.

Mr. Maginnis: Is the Secretary of State aware that, more than the question of free television licences, it is the nature of programmes which gives offence to pensioners, and that this problem should be tackled? Is he aware that deep offence was caused on 1 November, during a by-election in Dungannon district council, when on voting day the BBC transmitted a programme which highlighted the fact that the previous member for the seat had been shot by security forces when on IRA activity, and——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must relate his supplementary question to television licences for pensioners.

Mr. Maginnis: I am talking about the offence given to pensioners and the deep upset caused to them by news items such as these.

Mr. Lloyd: I think that that supplementary falls very much on the edge of the issue raised by the question. I understand the feelings expressed by the hon. Member, but they are matters not for me but for the Broadcasting Complaints Commission and the Broadcasting Standards Council, which have been set up to look at issues of that kind.

Mr. Holt: When my constituent Mrs. Littlefair received notification that, along with all her neighbours, she had been given a concessionary licence, she was naturally delighted. However, she received a further letter saying that, because of the inefficiences of Middlesbrough council, the bureaucratic bungling in the Home Office and the intransigence of the advice given by my hon. Friend, her concessionary licence was taken away, as were those of her three immediate neighbours, but not those of any of the other people. I have now been asked by the chief executive of Middlesbrough to bring in the ombudsman to see whether he will investigate the way in which Middlesbrough council has failed in its duty and the Home Office has been so intransigent.

Mr. Lloyd: I have much sympathy for my hon. Friend's constitutent, but the law gives no opportunity for Ministers to grant a concessionary licence when the individual concerned does not fall within the rules. The individual must be in a property which falls within the rules or have had a concessionary licence prior to the relevant date. If the individual did not have one but understood from Middlesbrough council that he or she would have one, that one was in force or that one was applied for, the remedy surely lies with the council. That, however, is a matter for my hon. Friend to pursue.

Mr. Corbett: Do not the supplementary question of the hon. Member for Langbaurgh (Mr. Holt) and other comments on this issue demonstrate that the concessionary licence scheme is arbitrary and unfair as between pensioner neighbours?

Mr. Ashby: Abolish the concession.

Mr. Corbett: Yes. The Government did not have the bottle to do that, but I agree that that is what they wanted to do.

Is the Minister aware that when a flat in a block occupied by pensioners is taken by a person under pensionable age, all the other pensioner residents lose the concession? Will the hon. Gentleman undertake to put that right?

Mr. Lloyd: The concession is carefully drawn to ensure that pensioners living in the equivalent of residential care, in warden-controlled or sheltered accommodation, may have the concession. As the rule has to be clear and understandable at law, and not challenged at law, the detail must be set out clearly. There can be no concessions for those who fall outside the rule. It is regrettable that that is so, but it is necessary for local authorities to organise themselves so that their tenants can take advantage of the scheme and to ensure that they do not let accommodation of the kind to which the hon. Gentleman referred to people not of pensionable age. That is the remedy and the solution.

Radio Frequencies

2. **Mr. Robert Hicks:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends next to meet the chairman of the BBC to discuss the allocation of radio frequencies; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend meets the chairman of the BBC from time to time to discuss a wide variety of broadcasting matters.

Mr. Hicks: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the adverse effect that the introduction of the new frequency arrangements could have on sports coverage, especially the ball-by-ball cricket test match commentary? Does he agree that those continuous commentaries, which have an international as well as a national audience, are an essential part of our lives and should be maintained even when there are competing sporting events on the same day? It is important that all of us should have the opportunity to know who is batting, how many runs have been scored or who has taken most wickets.

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend raises a matter of great national importance. The changes in the airwaves are to give many more people a much wider range of choice. I understand that most sporting events will be uninterrupted on the new Radio 5. The only likely clashes will be in June when Wimbledon and the test match come at the same time. It is entirely for the BBC to decide how to manage, bearing in mind what it considers audience demand to be. I understand that it intends to broadcast a ball-by-ball commentary of the test match and to intersperse within it occasional reports on other sporting events.

Mr. Wigley: In any such discussions, will the Minister take up the issue of wavelengths and reception for both radio and television in parts of Wales, as people in Wales are having considerable difficulty receiving programmes which originate from Wales? Will the hon. Gentleman consider the odd situation in which Kenny Dalglish can watch soccer matches from Wales in Liverpool while large sections of the population in Clwyd cannot receive those programmes?

Mr. Lloyd: I am aware that there are difficulties, especially in Wales, as are the BBC and the broadcasting authorities. There is a programme to improve FM transmission with the move to the new wavelengths for the BBC. The television authorities are aware of the difficulties in certain places, but I believe that broadcasting standards and reception are improving and are designed to improve markedly in the coming years until the old wavelengths are phased out.

Mr. Hague: When my hon. Friend next meets the chairman of the BBC to discuss radio frequencies, will he remind him of the continuing frustration of people in areas such as Swaledale and North Yorkshire that they cannot receive FM broadcasts and thus cannot listen to Radio 2? Will he urge the chairman to complete the construction of more repeater stations so that the whole nation can listen to FM broadcasts?

Mr. Lloyd: I note what my hon. Friend says. No doubt those responsible in the BBC and other broadcasting authorities will read our exchanges. As I said to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley), the BBC is mindful of the speed with which it needs to improve FM transmission in particular.

Broadcasting Act

3. **Mr. Clelland:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implications for the provisions of the Broadcasting Act of the merger of BSB and Sky Television.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Waddington): Under the Broadcasting Act 1990, the ownership provisions of the Broadcasting Act 1981 apply to the existing DBS contractor until 1993, and the IBA is accordingly considering whether the merged company is in conformity with the 1981 Act. I understand that the Office of Fair Trading is currently considering whether the merger falls within the scope of the merger provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973.

Mr. Clelland: Is the Secretary of State aware that while the Broadcasting Act 1990, which placed great emphasis on choice, gathers dust on the shelf, thousands of families like mine around the country who chose not to have Sky but to wait for the better quality and technologically superior BSB have had choice effectively removed from them without being consulted or having their wishes considered? What consultation will the right hon. and learned Gentleman undertake to ensure that the rights of such people are protected and that manufacturers, retailers and customers who do not wish to avail themselves of the offer that they cannot refuse from Sky are properly and fully compensated?

Mr. Waddington: The Act is designed to open up new opportunities. It is for entrepreneurs to take up those opportunities and for viewers to decide whether they deserve to succeed. It is no part of the Government's duty to prop up and subsidise the entrepreneurs.

Mr. Maclennan: What action would the Secretary of State propose to encourage diversification by Sky or BSkyB when it reaches a dominant position in the marketplace?

Mr. Waddington: It is not a matter for the Government, but I mentioned earlier that one of the consequences of what happened a week or so ago is that important decisions must be taken by the IBA and the Office of Fair Trading.

Mr. Hattersley: Bearing in mind the BSB-Sky merger and this week's announcement that Mr. Rupert Murdoch seems likely to acquire an interest in yet another newspaper, what are the Government's objections to and arguments against a general reference to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission asking it to inquire into the concentration of newspaper and media ownership?

Mr. Waddington: That goes far wide of the question and of my responsibilities. We are dealing today with the consequences of what happened a week or so ago.

Sunday Trading

4. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received regarding the application of the law on Sunday

trading; and what is the latest figure he has for the number of actions instituted this year against stores contravening the Shops Act 1950.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Angela Rumbold): Since I answered a similar question from my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon, South (Mr. Marshall) on 1 November, five written representations broadly in favour of Sunday trading and three against have been received. Figures for the number of prosecutions instituted this year are not yet available.

Mr. Field: Is my hon. Friend aware that most people find the Sunday trading laws rather more confusing than one of Dr. Habgood's sermons? Is it not possible for the Government to consider giving the power to borough and district councils to take decisions about whether to allow Sunday trading so that decisions are taken at a local level, giving more power to the people and less to the prophets and the politicians?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend will know that local authorities have the opportunity to bring prosecutions in such matters. It would not be right for us to go further at present.

Mr. Ray Powell: Is the Minister aware of the law? If she is aware of it and believes, as the Prime Minister has said on many occasions, that it should be enforced, will she ensure that those who attempt to enforce the law are not pressurised by companies? I have a full list of companies that have gone to court to appeal against local authority decisions to impose the Sunday trading laws. It is about time the Minister sent a circular letter to all local authorities defining their responsibilities and, indeed, the legal position under the Sunday trading laws.

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman knows that there is no need for a circular letter. The law is perfectly clear. It is within the remit of local authorities to undertake to prosecute in such cases if that is what they wish to do.

Mr. Stanbrook: Is my hon. Friend aware that if the Government were to adopt as a sensible compromise the REST—recreation, emergencies, social gatherings and travel—proposals of the Keep Sunday Special campaign, there would be no difficulty in getting that reform through the House?

Mrs. Rumbold: As my hon. Friend knows, it is difficult at present to see how progress can be made because so many people hold divergent views on this matter. If there were any reasonable proposals that could command the support of a majority of the House and of Parliament it would, of course, be possible for us to consider legislation.

Mr. Randall: Is the Minister aware that the Conservative Government are encouraging law breaking because of their failure to reform the Shops Act 1950? That is happening despite the lecture on law breaking that the House received from the Home Secretary on Monday during the debate on the Queen's Speech. Is the Minister also aware that the Government's procrastination is resulting in allegedly threatening letters being sent to elected members of Macclesfield borough council by B and Q plc of the Kingfisher group, which is continuing to trade illegally? I notice that this matter is also causing concern to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), whom I see in his place. The Minister is responsible for this mess. When is she going to reform that Act ? The House wants to know.

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. He knows perfectly well that it is not long since the House had a perfectly good opportunity to reform the legislation on Sunday trading, but hon. Members declined to do so. The hon. Gentleman's party participated fully in that debate. If the Opposition wish to have reform, it is in their interests to ensure that reasonable proposals come before the House so that all parties can agree on the way in which legislation should be framed.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will my hon. Friend ensure that in this country the law of this country is upheld? If undue pressure and threats are brought to bear by B and Q on officers and councillors of the borough of Macclesfield, will she ensure that the Government are prepared to support the council and to ensure that a company is not allowed, because of its wealth, to bring such undue, unfortunate and undemocratic pressure to bear upon a duly elected council?

Mrs. Rumbold: My hon. Friend is aware that the place for such disputes is undoubtedly and indisputably in the courts. It is important that my hon. Friend should remember that it is not possible for Ministers to do more than that which falls within the scope of their responsibilities, which is to uphold the rights of local authorities to pursue such matters in the courts.

Several hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. Exceptionally, and to ensure balance, I call Mr. Patrick Duffy.

Mr. Duffy: I shall be brief, Mr. Speaker. Has the Minister noticed the strength of the Keep Sunday Special movement in Germany? What consideration is she giving to the known intentions of some of its promoters in Germany to campaign for wider acceptance within the European Community?

Mrs. Rumbold: The hon. Gentleman will recognise that Sunday trading is a matter for this Parliament and that we must discuss their wishes with the people of this country. It is because there is a discrepancy among the different groups that we have so far been unable to put forward any proposals that could command the support of the majority of the people of this country and enable Parliament to pass an Act.

Prison Population

5. **Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current level of the prison population.

Mr. Waddington: This morning, there were 44,540 prisoners held in prison service establishments in England and Wales. In addition, a further 970 were held in police cells.

Mr. Yeo: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that those figures are already encouragingly below the trends forecast some years ago? Will he ensure that the Government's twin-track approach to sentencing, which

involves longer sentencing of violent offenders but greater use of non-custodial penalties for those who commit less serious offences, is fully implemented?

Mr. Waddington: I will certainly do the last. As my hon. Friend knows, that is the theme of the proposals to be embodied in the Criminal Justice Bill which we shall be debating before long. My hon. Friend is right to say that much encouragement can be taken from recent figures, which show a fall of 2,962 prisoners by comparison with one year ago and a fall of more than 5,000 compared with two years ago.

Mr. Bermingham: Does the Home Secretary agree that in view of the number of suicides and other problems associated with prisoners suffering from mental deficiency, it is time to give prison medical services extra funding pro tem, so as to ensure early diagnosis of prisoners at risk?

Mr. Waddington: I am not sure that it is just a question of extra funding, but the hon. Gentleman is right in thinking that we have a serious problem on our hands. We asked the chief inspector of prisons, Judge Tumim, to investigate and I expect to receive his report before long. Meanwhile, a number of important measures have been taken throughout the prison estate for dealing with that very real problem.

Mr. Lawrence: Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that there has been a reduction not just in the total prison population but in overcrowding within prisons and, in particular, a substantial fall in the past year in the number of three-to-a-cell prisoners?

Mr. Waddington: A combination of our prison building programme and the important reforms embodied in the Criminal Justice Act 1982 and 1988 resulted in fewer young offenders being sent to prison or to young offenders institutions. That has changed the scene radically. The new criminal justice legislation will extend to the whole age range the kind of measures that have proved so successful in respect of young offenders.

Mr. Battle: In the light of Judge Tumim's report on Armley prison in my constituency, does the Home Secretary accept that it is universally agreed that Armley is a totally inappropriate place to send young, unconvicted remand prisoners? What plans does the Home Office have to provide an alternative and by what date does the Home Secretary envisage that Armley prison's remand wing will be closed down?

Mr. Waddington: Our response to Judge Tumim's report was made public on 6 November and it is available in the Library. I indicated that action had already been taken to improve conditions within Armley, in terms of staffing and the regime. Harking back to an earlier question, the recommendations on suicide prevention have already been adopted. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we must take other measures, particularly in getting young offenders out of Armley. We intend before long to move adult offenders into another prison, so in due course there will be more scope for providing better accommodation for young remand prisoners in Yorkshire.

Mr. Charles Wardle: In his consideration of the prison population and the prison building programme, will my right hon. and learned Friend bear in mind that Northeye prison in my constituency is scheduled for closure? Will the site be sold when that happens, or will it be retained indefinitely by the prison service?

Mr. Waddington: I cannot give my hon. Friend an off-the-cuff answer, but I will write to him. He will appreciate that it was important to undertake the review of the prison estate that I reported to the House in the summer because we must make the best possible use of the accommodation available within the prison estate.

Security Service Tribunal

6. **Mr. Archer:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases are currently under review by the Security Service Tribunal; and how many of them relate to matters that took place prior to December 1989.

Mr. Waddington: The Security Service Act 1989 established the Security Service Tribunal as an independent body and it is not for me to make available details of its work. The tribunal is precluded by the Act from considering matters that took place before the implementation of the Act on 18 December 1989.

Mr. Archer: Is it a closely guarded secret whether the tribunal is declining jurisdiction in cases where the inquiry began before it was established? If it is, will the Home Secretary confirm that that is not what the Act says, and it would surprise hon. Members who voted for it?

Mr. Waddington: I have made absolutely plain what the Act says. There is not the slightest doubt that the tribunal is precluded by the Act from considering matters that took place before its implementation. It is not for me to give details of the tribunal's work. It was established by Parliament as an independent body—*[Interruption.]* If hon. Gentlemen will wait for a moment.

The Security Service Commissioner may choose to cover the work of the tribunal in his report.

Squatters

8. **Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department has any plans to bring forward proposals to tighten the law on squatters.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. John Patten): As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister told the House on 19 June, we are considering the criminal law on squatting as it affects unoccupied residential property. This is a difficult and complex area in which the criminal law has traditionally not played a major role in England and Wales. But we recognise that there is a case for strengthening the law and I hope to announce the Government's intentions in due course.

Mr. Burns: Does my right hon. Friend accept that a number of my constituents who have suffered because of the reprehensible activities of squatters will welcome the answer that he has given me today? Many of my constituents cannot understand why—despite the complexities of this aspect of law—the law cannot be brought into line with that governing a prime residence. Can the Minister advise me when he might be able to make an announcement on this matter?

Mr. Patten: I know of my hon. Friend's strong feelings on behalf of his constituents, and especially the occupant and owner of The Warren, near Chelmsford. I understand the distress that his constituents went through. My hon. Friend is right. There are serious issues to be considered here and that is exactly what my right hon. and learned Friend and I are doing at the moment. We hope to make an announcement as soon as possible.

Mr. Haynes: Can I make a suggestion to the Minister? He should have a word with the Secretary of State for the Home Department over these problems, that is squatters. Could I suggest that he tell the Secretary of State—[HON. MEMBERS: "No. Ask a question".] I have already asked a question. When the Secretary of State sits round that table at No. 10 drinking tea, doing nothing else, only doing as he is told by that lady in the chair, he might overcome the problem if he told her to change her policy on housing. So get stuck in and do something about it.

Mr. Patten: It seems to me that the hon. Gentleman is a little overexcited. It might be advisable, Mr. Speaker —if I may make a suggestion—if you put the kind ladies and gentlemen in white coats on watch as they may need to take him away a bit later.

Mr. Haynes *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that that was meant in a kindly way.

Mr. Haynes: No it was not. On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, if I had said that to the Minister you would have thrown me out of the place. It is time that you dealt with him. I am not satisfied. Deal with him. I will whitecoat him outside.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I still think it was friendly and if the hon. Member had said it I should have thought it was friendly, too.

Mr. John Marshall: When my hon. Friend examines the law on squatters, will he also consider the law on gipsies, who frequently behave anti-socially, are often parasites on society and frequently tax dodgers?

Mr. Patten: That is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment. My hon. Friend's constituents have some protection under section 39 of the Public Order Act 1986, which is a useful Act. It might be of use in respect of the hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Haynes).

Police Funding, Staffordshire

Mrs. Heal: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he is next to meet the chief constable of Staffordshire to discuss police funding.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. Friend has no plans at present to meet the chief constable, but Home Office Ministers are in regular contact with chief officers of police.

Mrs. Heal: In view of the hopelessly inadequate allocation of funds to the Staffordshire police authority for 1990-91, can the Home Secretary assure us that the level of capital grant will be sufficient to meet the known operational requirements of the police authorities for vehicles and other equipment in the coming year?

Mr. Lloyd: I am sure that the hon. Lady knows that the capital expenditure on vehicles, plant and equipment was open ended. In 1988-89 it was approximately £150 million. In 1989-90 it leapt to £238 million. Therefore, we had to cap central Government's contribution. That amounted to £174 million. There was, therefore, an increase that year, compared with the 1988-89 allocation. Next year, the figure will rise to £220 million. That is a substantial increase. It will be made available for the capital expenditure to which the hon. Lady referred. There will, therefore, again be more money. Moreover, we are consulting the police authorities about a mechanism to ensure that that money is shared out as fairly as possible.

Mr. Cormack: Is my hon. Friend aware that earlier this year our right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State received a deputation of county council representatives and Members of Parliament from all parts of the House? Is he also aware that the chief constable was a member of that deputation, that a very powerful case was made and that we are eagerly awaiting a good and positive reply?

Mr. Lloyd: Yes, I know that such a meeting took place and that my right hon. and noble Friend took close note of what was said. I hope that my hon. Friend has also taken note of what I have said: we are seeking, with the police authorities, to devise a mechanism to ensure that the money is distributed as fairly as possible and that it goes where it is most needed.

Mr. Sheerman: The way in which the Government have played around with the current and capital expenditure of county authorities such as Staffordshire means that the police have been hamstrung when planning to meet the rising level of crime that faces them, day in, day out, under the Thatcher Government. Is not it about time that the Government gave certainty to the financial structure? That is what the police need if they are to fight crime effectively.

Mr. Lloyd: That is exactly what we have done. We have changed an open-ended situation that was not used well by some local authorities and police authorities, to the disadvantage of others. We have set a cap on it which allows for a sensible increase each year.

Bicycles

10. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to enforce the law requiring bicycles to be adequately lit when being ridden on public highways during the hours of darkness.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Responsibility for the enforcement of road traffic law rests with individual chief officers of police.

Mr. Bowis: Does my hon. Friend agree that what we must encourage is responsible cycling? Is he aware of the increasing public concern about the danger to pedestrians, motorists and cyclists due to the practice of cycling at night without lights? Will he draw the problem to the attention of the police, particularly the Metropolitan police?

Mr. Lloyd: I shall certainly draw this exchange to the attention of the Metropolitan police. As my hon. Friend said, it is an important matter, not least because there has been a considerable increase in the number of cyclist accidents during the last year. Only 20 per cent. of those accidents, however, occurred at night.

Mr. Cryer: Is not it true, however, that more danger is caused to cyclists by badly maintained roads and the failure of central Government to give enough money to local authorities to provide cycle ways? Is not it true that cyclists would be much better served if the Government were less parsimonious towards local authorities and provided them with adequate funds?

Mr. Lloyd: The hon. Gentleman is trying to construct an extraordinarily unconvincing explanation for people cycling in unsafe circumstances and unsafe conditions with their lights off. The hon. Gentleman's comments seem to have no relevance to the question that I was posed.

Mrs. Peacock: Is my hon. Friend aware that many cyclists who are involved in accidents after dark not only cannot be seen but cannot hear the traffic because they are riding with headphones on, playing loud music? Does my hon. Friend intend to take any action on that matter?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend has made a useful point. As I said earlier, I shall draw these matters to the attention of the police. My hon. Friend underlines the fact that cyclists can do a great deal more to make their cycling safer.

Policing, Cumbria

11. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from Cumbria on the question of policing.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend has received no representations from the Cumbria police authority since March 1989. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State visited Cumbria police in May 1990.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In the light of the high incidence of petty crime and burglary in the county, may I make a special plea on behalf of hundreds of thousands of Cumbrians that the Government look most sympathetically on any request for additional policing resources for the county? Things really are quite bad.

Mr. Lloyd: Of course, the hon. Gentleman can be sure that we will look carefully at any such request. As he knows, extra police officers will be announced towards the end of the year. I commend the Cumbrian police authority for the way in which it has used the civilianisation programme. It has used the programme sensibly and better than many other authorities in the country. The increase in the crime rate in Cumbria, particularly for the crimes mentioned by the hon. Gentleman is lower than the national increase.

Mr. Jopling: Is my hon. Friend aware that if he is looking for examples throughout the country of good relations between the police and the public, he could do no better than offer Cumbria as such an example?

Mr. Lloyd: Cumbria is a very good example and I have already mentioned some of its successes in my reply to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

Mr. Martlew: Will the Minister have urgent talks with the Secretary of State for the Environment, who is under the impression that Cumbria is spending too much on its police? He said that under the standard spending assessment, £1·6 million too much is being spent. It is obvious to the people of Cumbria that that is not the case. Is not it a fact that, unless the county council cuts its police budget, we are likely to be capped this year by the Government?

Mr. Lloyd: The council must make its own judgment in terms of its obligations under the law and the arrangements for the community charge that it receives.

Petty Criminals

12. **Mr. Anthony Coombs:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures are being taken to ensure that petty criminals receive community-based sentences rather than imprisonment.

Mr. John Patten: My right hon. and learned Friend's Criminal Justice Bill, with the new framework for sentencing, will ensure that offenders are punished according to the seriousness of their crimes. In all but the most serious crimes the courts will have to consider a pre-sentence report before imposing imprisonment. Custody will need to be justified by the seriousness of the offence or the need to protect the public from harm. A wider and more flexible range of tough and demanding community penalties is proposed to enable more offenders to be adequately punished in the community.

Mr. Coombs: I strongly support the greater use of community-based punishments, but does my right hon. Friend agree that, if they are to have a deterrent effect as well as a rehabilitative effect, they must be significantly more rigorous and better monitored? What steps does he intend to take to ensure that that is done?

Mr. Patten: My hon. Friend will recognise that in some parts of the country supervision is not adequately firm and in other parts the probation service does an excellent job. My right hon. and learned Friend and I are trying to ensure higher standards through his proposed legislation and through national standards for the imposition of punishment in the community.

Mr. Tony Banks: Is the Minister contemplating any penalties for people who use sexist and abusive language on car phones?

Mr. Patten: There is a proposal in Lord Justice Taylor's report to outlaw the chanting of racist abuse at football games and my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary has announced that we shall pursue that as soon as possible.

Computer Crime

13. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps are being taken to improve police officers' training to investigate computer crime.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The police staff college runs a 20-day course for computer crime investigators entitled "Investigative Techniques in Computer Crime". The course is subject to continuous review and takes account of suggestions from forces and regular contact with the computer crime unit of the Metropolitan police.

Mr. Colvin: Does my hon. Friend agree that, although the Metropolitan police is well equipped to investigate highly sophisticated crimes, the 43 provincial forces are not? Will he confirm that, if necessary, they can enlist the

help of specialist computer firms with their inquiries, and would not it be a good idea if they were to add computer security to their crime prevention campaigns?

Mr. Lloyd: My hon. Friend's question is a matter for chief police officers. One of the advantages of the course that I mentioned is that officers from all police forces make contacts that enable them to know where to obtain additional expertise in the private sector, and it also enables them to have contact with the computer crime unit of the Metropolitan police, whose skills they can take advantage of.

Mr. Speaker: Questions to the Prime Minister——

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No.

Mr. Winterton: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I insist on raising it now.

Mr. Speaker: Insist? The hon. Gentleman is a member of the Chairman's Panel. He knows that I take points of order at their proper time, not in the middle of questions.

Mr. Winterton: I am sorry, but I cannot hear what is going on in this place. Could the instruments be adjusted to enable us to hear? Could they possibly be turned up so that we can hear what Ministers and others are saying? It is important.

Mr. Speaker: Was that the point of order?

Mr. Winterton: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: This is in the hands of the House. If hon. Members do not make a noise or interrupt from the Back Benches, they will hear. The louder the microphones are turned up, the greater is the reflection from the amplifier back to the microphones. It makes even more noise.

Mr. Skinner: Heseltine will change all that.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let us start again.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Q1. **Mr. Ashby:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

The Prime Minister (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher): This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today, including one with Chief Buthelezi.

Mr. Ashby: Is my right hon. Friend aware that in 1983, when I was elected to the House, unemployment in my constituency was 16 per cent. but is now 3·2 per cent., despite losing its major industry of coal mining? Is she further aware that a recent study showed that there is more employment and greater prosperity than ever before? Is not that a reflection of experience throughout the country?

The Prime Minister: I am glad to hear that my hon. Friend's constituency is doing so well after eleven and a half years of Conservative Government: long may it continue. We have the lowest unemployment rate in the Community, with the exception of Luxembourg. We have created some 2 million jobs since we took office and the future will depend very much on precisely how people run their businesses and keep their costs competitive.

Mr. Kinnock: Will the Prime Minister confirm that the Madrid conditions were imposed upon her by resignation threats from the then Foreign Secretary and the then Chancellor of the Exchequer?

The Prime Minister: Our undertaking to join the exchange rate mechanism stems from as far back as 1979, as the right hon. Gentleman will see if he looks at some of the manifestos of that period.

Mr. Kinnock: My question was specific, and so was the recollection of the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), with the obvious assent of the right hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Lawson). Is the Prime Minister telling us that there were no resignation threats on the issue of the Madrid conditions?

The Prime Minister: I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, that the exchange rate mechanism undertaking is very long standing. The right hon. Gentleman will have heard from the Dispatch Box many times that we would join when the time was right; we did join when the time was right, and no one has really been able to criticise that with validity.

Mr. Teddy Taylor: Is the Prime Minister aware that local education authorities in Britain last year spent £18·6 billion? Is she further aware that, if the share carried by the poll tax were transferred to national taxation, according to the House of Commons Library it would mean an increase in income tax of 20 per cent., or more than 5p in the pound? Does the Prime Minister agree that anyone who claims that educational spending could be transferred from local councils to the Government without a huge increase in national taxation must be a political joker?

The Prime Minister: If all education costs were transferred to central Government and the grant were left with local government, it would mean a huge increase in income tax—as my hon. Friend has said—or a substantial reduction in the moneys available for other services, such as health, pensions, defence and law and order. There would be either a big increase in income tax or a substantial reduction in other public expenditure. The alternative is to take away the grant from local authorities, which in fact greatly exceeds the amount spent on education.

Mr. Ashdown: Does the Prime Minister recall saying to the *London Standard*, exactly five years ago yesterday, that she would "go in 5 years"? Does she recall her words at that time? She said:

"then I would have been in 11¼ years",

adding that the time would then have come for someone else to "carry the torch"? What has changed her mind?

The Prime Minister: I confess that that was not the foremost thought in my mind at the present time. After three general election victories, leading, as I do, the only party with clear policies—resolutely carried out—I intend to continue.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: Is my right hon. Friend aware how disastrous it would be for the United Kingdom

clothing and textile industries if the multi-fibre arrangement were phased out before we had achieved a real and effective strengthening of GATT rules and disciplines, which, at a conservative estimate, would take at least a decade?

The Prime Minister: We must negotiate those things at the GATT talks. If we do not extend freedom of trade, many of our exports will be denied admission by third-world countries. In the past, textile quotas in one country have deliberately prevented it from making orders for other commodities—especially in engineering—from this country. We must negotiate that at GATT, and we intend to do so.

Q2. **Mr. Harry Barnes:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Barnes: Will the Prime Minister tell us who and what is fiddling the franchise in England, Scotland and Wales, where there is a shortfall of 600,000 on the electoral register? Will she also tell us who and what is fiddling the franchise in Finchley, where 8·5 per cent. have gone missing from the register in the past two years? That is equivalent to 32 people missing from an electorate of 372, however sophisticated or unsophisticated that electorate is. Are not the "who" the Prime Minister's current Government and former Governments—no matter who were members of those Governments—and the "what" the poll tax, which is unreformable in relation to the electoral register?

The Prime Minister: Local residents have a duty to register for the electoral roll and for the community charge, and they also have a duty to pay the community charge. Those who do not do so are passing their burden on to their neighbours while nevertheless expecting to have all local authority benefits.

Mr. Arbuthnot: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the agreement on conventional forces in Europe, which she will sign in Paris next week, represents an historic step forward in arms control? Does she agree that, if the west had not maintained its resolute stand, led by her Government, that would never have been achieved?

The Prime Minister: Representatives of 35 nations will be at the conference in Paris, where we shall sign that excellent agreement. It is very beneficial to this country. It removes from us the danger of a surprise attack. It reduces the forces that we will have to keep in Europe. I agree with my hon. Friend that none of that would have been possible but for a resolute defence and, in particular, the stationing of cruise and Pershing missiles, Britain being the first to do so.

Q3. **Mr. Jack Thompson:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Thompson: Because in normal circumstances two heads are better than one, will the Prime Minister consider seeking the help of her right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) to sort out the poll tax problems?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment had a review of the community charge and made an announcement. All the effects have not yet come into action. Further orders following the announcement of that review are soon to be laid before the House. There will be some benefits from the extra transitional charge and from the £2·55 billion extra money that was allocated to the revenue support grant which goes to local authorities. All those measures have yet to come into effect.

Sir Hal Miller: At a time when people are trying to spread doom and gloom about our manufacturing industry, will my right hon. Friend reflect on the performance of the motor industry which, even last month, increased production, exports and investment? Will my right hon. Friend please support that success by ensuring that our continental partners do not impose limits on the export of cars made in this country?

The Prime Minister: Yes, to both parts of my hon. Friend's question. The British car industry is doing extremely well—better than it has done for many years. I think that Rover is the only company in Europe that is working 24 hours a day. It still has a waiting list for some of its products. That is an enormous change from when it was a nationalised industry. Cars are also exported from Ellesmere Port, which is very good. We shall do precisely what my hon. Friend wishes and try to ensure that all cars made in this country are freely exported and circulated around the European Community.

Mr. Faulds: In view of the somewhat sleazy appointments of some of the trustees to the boards of national institutions and in view of Gerald Ronson's conviction, what does the Prime Minister intend to do to take him off the board of the natural history museum?

The Prime Minister: All appointments to national institutions are made carefully, as the hon. Gentleman is well aware, and they will continue to be made carefully. People—the overwhelming majority—do a great service for those institutions.

Q4. **Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I should like to draw the Prime Minister's attention to the plight of many people in private care homes. As her Government have cut income support payments to those residents in real terms and as her Government intend to end housing benefit payments to those residents, what advice does the right hon. Lady have for those elderly and disabled people who face the prospect of going down market to cheaper, inferior accommodation or becoming homeless as a direct result of her Government's policies?

The Prime Minister: This Government have increased enormously the amount of taxpayers' money available for residential homes and for nursing homes. If the hon.

Gentleman looks up the figures, he will find that for every £1 Labour spent on those people in those homes, this Government are spending something over £100. It is a very good record.

Mr. Bill Walker: Is my right hon. Friend aware that when she came into office as Prime Minister in 1979, spinning mills and canning factories in my constituency had closed under the previous Labour Government and that in the small town where I live, almost 600 people found themselves out of work? Today, the unemployment level in that area is about 4 per cent. and take-home pay has increased by more than 25 per cent. over the rate of inflation. Does not that show that my right hon. Friend has done the right thing for Scotland and for the Scottish people?

The Prime Minister: We have not only the highest number ever of people in jobs in this country but the right background for enterprise to flourish and the lowest unemployment rate in the whole of Europe, with the exception of Luxembourg. It is a very good record. Added to that, we have the highest standard of living that we have ever achieved.

Several Hon. Members *rose*——

Mr. Speaker: Order. I inadvertently called two Opposition Members running, so I shall balance it up. I call Mr. Brazier.

Mr. Brazier: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the EC Ministers passed a resolute resolution on the Gulf crisis at the previous summit, but that when it comes to action, we see, once again, that Britain is proving to be the best European?

The Prime Minister: Both the United Nations and the European Community have passed excellent resolutions making it quite clear that Iraq must leave Kuwait and that the legitimate Government and the normal way of life in Kuwait must be restored. It is not the United Nations that can put its resolutions into effect, but the separate countries—those countries that have kept their armed forces fully up to date, flexible and able to go anywhere at short notice. In Europe, this country leads.

Q5. **Mr. Darling:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Darling: The Prime Minister will be aware that her right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) suggested that the poll tax is capable of a fundamental review—despite the fact that he voted for the poll tax for Scotland. He must have changed his mind 12 months later, but I suppose that that is another matter. Does the Prime Minister consider that the poll tax is capable of a fundamental review or does she accept that the only fundamental review that it needs is complete repeal, which will be undertaken by the next Labour Government?

The Prime Minister: There was a fundamental review whose results have yet to show through in the poll tax or community charge payments next spring. I understand that the Opposition are going back to rates. They will have to have a revaluation after 17 years and the effects on people will be utterly devastating.

Q6. **Mr. Lawrence:** To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for Thursday 15 November.

The Prime Minister: I refer my hon. and learned Friend to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Mr. Lawrence: When my right hon. Friend speaks for Britain at the Helsinki review conference next week in Paris, which will be attended by the other world leaders, will she ensure that the momentum in human rights that earlier conferences built up, so that human rights were introduced into the Soviet Union and into the eastern European countries, will be maintained?

The Prime Minister: I agree with my hon. and learned Friend that that development was one of the tremendous benefits of the Helsinki accord. It took a long time to show through, although we had increased Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union for some time, which then went down. It meant that those who were fighting for human rights in the eastern European countries and in the Soviet Union knew that they were not alone, and that we could and did inquire regularly of the Soviet Union and of the eastern European countries on their behalf. That was very, very beneficial indeed. We will continue to keep up all our beliefs in human rights and we will constantly raise questions about them. I hope, when I return from that conference in Paris, to make a statement to the House about it next Wednesday.

Business of the House

3.34 pm

Dr. John Cunningham (Copeland): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. John MacGregor): Yes, Sir. The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 19 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill.

TUESDAY 20 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Criminal Justice Bill.

Motion to take note of EC document on aid to shipbuilding. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

WEDNESDAY 21 NOVEMBER—Opposition day (1st Allotted Day). Until about seven o'clock there will be a debate entitled "The Scottish Economy". Afterwards there will be a debate entitled "The Textile Industry". Both debates arise on Opposition motions.

Motion on the Statistics of Trade Act 1947 (Amendment of Schedule) Order 1990.

THURSDAY 22 NOVEMBER—Until about seven o'clock Second Reading of the Disability Living Allowance and Disability Working Allowance Bill, followed by Second Reading of the Armed Forces Bill.

FRIDAY 23 NOVEMBER—There will be a debate on the GATT round of trade negotiations on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

MONDAY 26 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Statutory Sick Pay Bill.

[Tuesday 20 November
Relevant European Community documents:

8097/90	*Aid to ship-building*
9416/90	*Report on shipbuilding industry in Community 1989*

Relevant Report of European Legislation Committee
HC 11-xxxii (1989-90)

Friday 23 November
Relevant European Community documents:

(a) Un-numbered	*General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade: Uruguay Round*
(b) Un-numbered	*General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade: negotiations on Agriculture*

Relevant Reports of European Legislation Committee
(a) HC 29-i (1990-91)
(b) HC 43-v (1987-88), HC 43-xxxv (1987-88) and HC 15-i (1988-89)]

Dr. Cunningham: Why has not the Secretary of State for Wales made an oral statement on the revenue support grant for Wales? Should not hon. Members representing constituencies in the Principality have an opportunity to question the Secretary of State about the implications of that settlement for poll tax payers in Wales?

Does the Leader of the House intend to arrange a debate on European Community affairs before the intergovernmental conference on economic, monetary and political union takes place on 13 and 14 December? Given the widely acknowledged importance of the intergovernmental conference, and in recognition of the large divisions of opinion within the Government and the Conservative party, should not the House have the opportunity to listen to such a debate so that Opposition Members at least may know which side will prevail before Britain's case is argued at that conference?

The Leader of the House will be aware that today we have had the announcement of the largest increase in unemployment for four and a half years. This is the seventh consecutive month in which unemployment has increased and it now stands at 1·7 million. Is not that yet another indication of the deepening economic and industrial recession that is the inevitable consequence of the policies being pursued by the Chancellor of the Exchequer? Will the Leader of the House arrange an early debate on the Government's economic and industrial policies—particularly as they apply to unemployment?

Mr. MacGregor: The hon. Gentleman's first question was about the revenue support grant for Wales. He will recognise that I shall have to look into that matter as, clearly, there are normally other times when that is discussed.

The hon. Gentleman asked about European Community affairs. It has been clear from our recent debates, in which economic and monetary issues and wider European issues have been discussed—most recently, yesterday—that there is substantial agreement on the Conservative Benches. I suspect that the divisions are really among Opposition Members.

The hon. Gentleman asked for time for a debate. As he will know, it is normally for the convenience of the House to hold traditional debates on the EC six-monthly White Paper. I understand that it has now been agreed that in those debates we should look forward as well as dealing with the previous six months. The timing of such a debate is best left for consideration through the usual channels, but if we can look forward in the debate, we can cover points to be discussed at the intergovernmental meeting. I agree that it is important that the House should have a debate on these matters before then.

The hon. Gentleman asked about unemployment. We have been debating industrial and economic matters extensively for the past two days, and the votes last night proved resoundingly that there is support for the Government's economic policies. I cannot hold out the prospect of another debate immediately. The hon. Gentleman will know that employment, which is the key factor, is at an all-time high. As I said in my speech last night, the number of the work force in employment has been rising for the past seven years. It has increased by 3·6 million in that time, and the United Kingdom still has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the whole Community.

Sir Peter Emery (Honiton): I am sure that the House would want to thank my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for and congratulate him on his announcement yesterday which met part of our recommendation about the parliamentary calendar. We now know the dates for the Christmas and Easter recesses.

Is my right hon. Friend progressing with the appointment of members to the special European Standing Committees to deal with European matters which are not to be considered on the Floor of the House? I hope that the members will be appointed to those Committees so that they can begin operating perhaps by the end of the month.

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his opening comments. I hope that the announcement that I made yesterday evening, which of course must be subject to the satisfactory progress of business, will be for the convenience of all hon. Members. My hon. Friend's second point is a matter for the Committee of Selection to move ahead and select the members for those Committees. It is not a matter for me.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): Although we had useful exchanges after the statement on the Cullen report by the Secretary of State for Energy on Monday, does the Leader of the House accept that that report is vast and, given that report and the issues of industrial relations in the offshore industry, do we not need a more substantive debate on the matter?

I am sure that the Leader of the House is doing his best to set up a Select Committee on Scottish Affairs, but may I suggest that he gets in touch with the Royal Bank of Scotland to discover whether the leave extended to the right hon. Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) to run the Prime Minister's election campaign can be extended further to allow him to serve on a Scottish Select Committee?

Mr. MacGregor: I have nothing to add to what I said yesterday evening about the Scottish Select Committee. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger) has many talents and he can carry out many functions at the same time, but I am not sure that he could do them all. I have said that I will look into the matter, but I think that it is very unlikely that progress can be made on it.

The House had a full exchange on the Piper Alpha report on Monday. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government have accepted the recommendations in the Cullen report. I cannot promise an early or immediate debate on the matter, because we have a very full programme in the weeks ahead.

Mr. Bob Dunn (Dartford): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the House should have an opportunity to examine not only Government policies but those of the Opposition as well? If he accepts that, will he arrange for at least one day of Government time to allow us to debate and examine the Labour party's education policies which are both deceitful and dishonest in as much as they exist and will contribute nothing to the raising of standards, but will rather lead to the destruction of the grammar schools, city technology colleges and grant-maintained schools and will hinder the education opportunities of thousands of children?

Mr. MacGregor: I cannot promise a precise all-day debate on the Labour party's policies. However, there will be many opportunities to raise those issues. My hon. Friend will be aware that last night I made precisely the same points that he has just made about some aspects of the Labour party's education policies.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Is the Leader of the House aware of the increasing incidence of stolen vehicles speeding through residential areas, one of which last night ended in the tragic death of a 10-month-old baby in my constituency? Can he promise an early statement on that problem which will include an examination of the inadequacies of the law relating to car theft and the resourcing of the police and which will also include the provision of adequate and proper resources to local authorities to allow them to provide traffic calming devices in residential areas without the fear of poll tax capping or having to cut other essential services?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the whole House will be sorry to hear of yesterday's tragic accident. There will be a debate on road safety tomorrow in which the hon. Gentleman can raise such matters.

Mr. Patrick Cormack (Staffordshire, South): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 4 which deals with compensation for haemophiliac AIDS victims?

[That this House calls upon the Secretary of State for Health urgently to conclude an out-of-court settlement with people with haemophilia who were infected with the AIDS virus in the course of National Health Service treatment and with their families in cases where they have already died.]

Is he aware that there is continuing and growing concern about the plight of people who are suffering through no fault of their own? If the Government would change their mind on the subject, that would meet with universal approval.

Mr. MacGregor: This matter was raised last week in business questions, and I said then that, as my hon. Friend knows, the Government have always accepted the strong moral argument in favour of the haemophiliacs, and that is why we have made £34 million available for ex gratia payments and have promised to keep that figure under review. However, the Government do not accept liability and will resist any settlement that implies admission of negligence. This matter has been discussed on a number of occasions, so I cannot promise an early debate in the normal way.

Mr. Gerald Bermingham (St. Helens, South): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on energy policy as it affects certain manufacturing industries such as the glass industry? He may be aware that the French are alleged to subsidise their energy costs. As the Government are about to sell off the electricity industry, would it not be fair if the House were to discuss the subject, because glass is more expensive to make here than in France, which is costing us British jobs?

Mr. MacGregor: There was the opportunity during the debate on the Queen's Speech to raise a large number of industrial issues, and I am sure that there will be other opportunities for the hon. Member to raise that issue if he so wishes. I cannot promise a debate on it in the near future.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I thank my right hon. Friend for announcing today that there will be a debate next week on the textile industry, albeit that that short debate will be in Opposition time and that there will be a debate on the general agreement on tariffs and trade. Will he give the House an assurance that in both debates a Minister of the highest level will be present and will take on board the views of the House so that, when the Government negotiate the future of the multi-fibre arrangement under the GATT renegotiations and the new treaty, the interests of an industry that employs more than half a million people will be taken fully into account, and that the views in other European countries that there should be a phasing out period of a minimum of 10 years, preferably 15 years, will be adopted by the British Government?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall not comment on the substance of the matters because, as my hon. Friend says, there will be two opportunities next week to debate them, which is more than we have in any one week. One will be in Opposition time and the other will be a full day's debate on the GATT Uruguay round. I put this subject into next week's business in response to the many requests that I received last week. An appropriate Minister will respond on both occasions.

Mr. Bill Michie (Sheffield, Heeley): I congratulate the three British women who, through their bravery, delayed the testing of the United Kingdom bomb in the Nevada desert the other day. Yesterday I suggested, on a point of order, that as there had been no debate on nuclear testing, even though discussions are taking place to ensure that there is no spread of nuclear weapons, there should be one. Quite rightly, Mr. Speaker, you advised me to raise the matter with the Leader of the House.

As this is such an important issue—the cold war is over and there is concern about the spread of nuclear weapons and technology—should not the House debate these issues? May we have Government time for such a debate?

Mr. MacGregor: We had a full day's debate on foreign and defence matters last week and there will be other opportunities, such as at Question Time, to raise the matter. I cannot promise a full day's debate soon.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Notwithstanding the fact that we are to have a debate on the Armed Forces Bill next week—a purely disciplinary measure—and that recently we had a debate during the Queen's Speech debate on foreign affairs and defence, could my right hon. Friend bring forward at the earliest possible debate, preferably before the Christmas recess, the three single service debates, as there is a prolonged deployment of our armed forces in the Gulf and an imminent threat of war in that theatre?

Mr. MacGregor: I have heard what my hon. Friend said, but I cannot say how we shall be spending our time between now and the Christmas recess. I shall bear his point in mind.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East): Is it not pathetic for Tory Members of Parliament to criticise the Common Market on the basis that European manufactured exports to the United Kingdom are vastly greater than United Kingdom manufactured exports to Europe, especially given the Government's policy, which has destroyed vast swathes of manufacturing industry, and high interest rates, which are hampering and hindering that industry? Given the threat to Scotland's steel industry, and manufacturing firms such as Howdens, may we have an urgent debate on Scotland's steel industry and other manufacturing industries?

Mr. MacGregor: Manufacturing investment is at an all-time high. The hon. Gentleman cannot have heard me say that there will be a debate on the Scottish economy next week.

Mr. John Marshall (Hendon, South): May I ask my right hon. Friend to read early-day motion 30?

[That this House, on the occasion of the 700th anniversary of the expulsion of Jews from Britain, expresses its deep concern at the increase in the dissemination of antisemitic and racist materials in the United Kingdom; notes that none of the 21 antisemitic publications referred to the Attorney-General by the Board of Deputies of British Jews since 1986 have resulted in prosecutions; believes that firm, swift and effective action must be taken to cure neo-Nazi activity; and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to take such action against those responsible for these odious publications.]

My right hon. Friend will be aware that there is widespread concern at the growth of anti-semitism in the United Kingdom. Will he bring the law into line so that individuals who practise it can be prosecuted, which they are not now?

Mr. MacGregor: As I have said to my hon. Friend, I am aware of the concern to which he has referred. I have read early-day motion 30. My hon. Friend will know that there have been 11 prosecutions since 1986 for the incitement of racial hatred, which have included allegations involving antisemitic material. A further case is outstanding. Of the cases drawn to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General by the Board of Deputies of British Jews, nine—the most recent—are still under investigation or consideration.

Mr. Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool): The Leader of the House was helpful when he referred to the Piper Alpha disaster, and the House is grateful to him for that. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will take into account the fact that a debate in the House is urgent. In addition to the recommendations set out in the Cullen report, which are excellent, there are outstanding matters. I ask the right hon. Gentleman to reflect on the deep concern, and sometimes anger, that is felt by the work force. Many safety-related matters need to be reviewed by the House, not least the role of the Department of Energy, the management and its attitude and the need for a role to be played by the trade union movement. The House would like to discuss these matters.

Mr. MacGregor: I understand the hon. Gentleman 's concernabout the work force. I think that that was made plain on Monday, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy made clear the role of the Department and the acceptance of the report's recommendations in that respect. I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's comments to the attention of my right hon. Friend. There are difficulties about having an early debate on the specific subjects that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): Will my right hon. Friend find time soon to discuss the developing structure within the brewing industry? With the possible closure of the Greenall Whitley brewery, the largest regional brewer in the United Kingdom, and the closure of Matthew Brown and other developments, it seems that we are achieving a less diversified and competitive brewing industry. Now might be the time for a review of the industry.

Mr. Macgregor: I know of my hon. Friend's concern about these matters, and especially his constituency concern. I know also that he has raised them on several occasions both in the House and directly with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. He will know that the measures adopted by the Government following the report of the Monopolies and Mergers Commission on beer have been extensively debated in the House on several occasions in the past year.

[Mr. Macgregor]

The aim of the Government's measures is to promote a more competitive market for beer and other drinks. It is for individual companies to decide how best to respond to greater competition. I shall draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry once again.

Ms. Mildred Gordon (Bow and Poplar): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that some weeks ago I asked the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), when he was Leader of the House, to consider providing a stairlift for easy access to wheelchair users to the Grand Committee Room and the Jubilee Room, and a loop for hearing aid users? The right hon., and learned Gentleman replied that he would give the matter the attention that it deserved. I fear that since then he has been occupied with other matters. I believe, however, that the matter which I raised deserves urgent attention, and I ask the right hon. Gentleman to see what he can do to provide the facilities.

Mr. MacGregor: I am tempted to say to the hon. Lady, so have I. I shall look into the matter. It is not one that has yet been drawn to my attention. I think that it would be a matter for the House of Commons Commission, and I shall look into it in that context.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motions 2 and 3, signed by both Conservative and Opposition Members?

[That this House abhors the prospect of a resumption in the export of horses and ponies to continental abattoirs after 1992; urges the European Community (the European Commission, European Parliament and all member states) to recognise that the ending of British export controls linked to minimum values would mean the rounding up of Dartmoor and other wild ponies for degrading and wholly unfamiliar transport to and across Europe; and calls for changes to proposed European Community measures on the protection of animals during transport, in order to maintain restrictions which avoid cruel treatment to British horses and ponies during long journeys and at continental slaughterhouses.]

The matter causes great anxiety to people throughout the country. The motions deal with the export of live equines after 1992. There is huge anxiety that after that date, unless suitable alternatives to the minimum values controls are put in place, there will be brutal slaughter of our equines. That will be unacceptable to the people of Britain. May we have a debate on the entirely unacceptable policies of the European Commission on the matter?

Mr. MacGregor: I understand and share my hon. Friend's anxiety. Many of us have had many representations from our constituents on the matter. I am sure that my hon. Friend, who takes such a close interest in matters relating to horses and ponies, will be aware that the Government are fully committed to retaining controls to ensure that horses and ponies are not exported from Britain for slaughter abroad. The matter is being debated in the European Community. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is well aware of the views of the House, but I shall again draw his attention to my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Roy Beggs (Antrim, East): Is the Leader of the House aware that today is the fifth anniversary of the imposition of the infamous Anglo-Irish diktat and that Ulster Unionists and British citizens in Northern Ireland remain totally opposed to it? It has been rejected. Our opposition is no less than it was when a quarter of a million people protested peacefully at the city hall in Belfast. Does the Leader of the House recognise that the territorial claim in articles 2 and 3 of the Irish Republic's constitution is offensive? Will he undertake as soon as possible to provide a proper debate in the House so that hon. Members' views on those two major issues can be expressed and constructive suggestions can be made to the Irish Government?

Mr. MacGregor: I am aware that today is the fifth anniversary. The hon. Gentleman will know that there will be an opportunity for a debate on Monday next when the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Bill comes before the House. No doubt that will be an opportunity for some hon. Members to express their views again about the Anglo-Irish Agreement.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the House has set an excellent example in saving trees by introducing the new slimline Order Paper. The change seems to have the agreement of hon. Members on both sides of the House. However, my right hon. Friend may not be aware that Departments still send copies of replies to questions even when the hon. Member has had an answer in oral questions. Will my right hon. Friend use his considerable influence to make Departments stop that time-wasting exercise and save even more trees?

Mr. MacGregor: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising the matter and for saying that the change has had such a favourable response from hon. Members on both sides of the House. It saves not only trees but substantial sums of money in publishing costs. Therefore, it is a sensible measure. I shall look into the point that my hon. Friend has raised.

Mr. Dennis Canavan (Falkirk, West): May we expect a statement next week announcing the promotion of the hon. Member for Wiltshire, North (Mr. Needham) from the Northern Ireland Office to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in view of his expertise on the diagnosis of mad cow disease?

Mr. MacGregor: I myself have had to deal with BSE in the past. I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's question has much to do with business questions and I cannot see any opportunity for the matter to be raised next week.

Mr. John Butcher (Coventry, South-West): Is my right hon. Friend aware that yesterday Coventry cathedral and Coventry city council arranged a magnificent and moving commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the blitz of Coventry? Will he, together with you, Mr. Speaker, consider sending the bishop and the leader of the city council an appropriate appreciation of the way in which the event was put together? Will he also advise Members of the House on protocol and a sense of responsibility on such occasions? The President of the German Republic was present and the Queen Mother was present; three Labour Members of Parliament were absent. Surely that discloses a pretty awful lack of responsibilty——

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not an appropriate matter to raise with the Leader of the House at business questions. The hon. Member must ask for a debate.

Mr. Butcher: Surely that displays a lack of responsibility and a lack of courtesy whether——

Mr. Speaker: No. It is not the object of business questions to make attacks across the Chamber. The hon. Gentleman must ask a business question, and I think that he has done so.

Dr. Cunningham: May I invite you, Mr. Speaker, to ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw his attack on my colleagues?

Mr. Speaker: It was an inappropriate matter to raise at business questions, and I shall be grateful if the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher) will rephrase what he said.

Mr. Butcher: In due course, there should be some discussion of these events, which are important, and, in due course, there should be a debate. I have been challenged about whether those hon. Members were invited—*[Interruption.]* My point is—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. In terms of good order in the Chamber and between both sides of the House, the hon. Gentleman should withdraw any aspersions that he has made against Opposition Members, because he has already said that he has no knowledge of whether they were invited.

Mr. Butcher: I am perfectly willing to withdraw any allegations about whether or not hon. Members responded to an invitation. I am simply saying that we in the House should have a sense of priorities about attending such events in any capacity—even as members of the general public.

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that the whole House will agree with what my hon. Friend said about the importance of yesterday's event. I heard some reference to it on the radio and therefore share his views about it. My hon. Friend made some reference to you, Mr. Speaker, and to myself, which I shall happily discuss with you.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): May I add my voice to those who have pleaded for the Secretary of State for Wales to make a statement to the House about the Welsh revenue support settlement because, as a result of the way in which the poll tax is working—and especially the way in which the community charge is working in Wales—there is a desperate need for an early statement, next week if possible?

Will the Leader of the House clarify whether the debate on the GATT round on Friday of next week will be broad enough to encompass all the serious issues hitting agriculture at the moment because they raise some further topics?

Mr. MacGregor: On the first point, I cannot add to what I have said already, but obviously I shall look into the matter. On the second point, yes, next Friday's debate will cover all the GATT issues, of which agriculture is clearly a prominent, if not the main, issue.

Mr. Harry Ewing (Falkirk, East): May I ask the Leader of the House a simple and uncontroversial question on a House of Commons matter that might need urgent attention next Wednesday? In the event of a change in the personage of the principal occupant of the Treasury Bench, would the Leader of the House ensure that the Mace is firmly secured in its place when the House meets next Wednesday?

Mr. MacGregor: I expected a comment like that when the hon. Gentleman began his question. I have every confidence that my right hon. Friend will be Prime Minister—*[Interruption.]*—that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be Prime Minister then—[HON. MEMBERS: "Which right hon. Friend?"] My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I have already made that clear.

Mr. Andrew F. Bennett (Denton and Reddish): The Leader of the House will be well aware that private Bills have caused the House considerable trouble and have taken up a great deal of time in recent years; that a joint Select Committee of this House and the other place was set up to study the future of such procedures, that the Government produced a consultation document in the summer and that the consultation responses had to be in by the end of September. Is it not now time that we legislated to reform the private Bill procedure? Will the Government bring forward some proposals at an early opportunity?

Mr. MacGregor: I know that my predecessor, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe), was looking actively at this matter, and he has already discussed it with me. I hope to give some attention to it myself fairly shortly.

Mr. Max Madden (Bradford, West): May I thank the Leader of the House for responding favourably to early-day motion 6, which has been signed by more than 100 hon. Members of all parties and which asks for a debate on GATT?

[That this House, recognising the importance of the textile and clothing industries to the economy of the United Kingdom, urges Her Majesty's Government to arrange an early debate to discuss the present and future trading prospects of these industries; and believes the Multi-Fibre Arrangement should be retained unless adequate transitional arrangements are agreed and proper safeguards for the British industries are incorporated into the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.]

I echo the earlier comments of the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton). I understand that Ministers will be occupied with other matters over the weekend, relating to leadership elections, but could the Leader of the House telephone the hapless Ministers who will speak in the debate on textiles on Wednesday and on GATT on Friday and tell them that they can expect considerable trouble unless they can give the House firm assurances that the multi-fibre arrangement will not be phased out unless and until firm safeguards are incorporated into GATT, and that even then we will tolerate the MFA being phased out only over a minimum of 10 years? Anything less than that and there will be considerable trouble. Will the Leader of the House warn those Ministers in advance?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sure that my right hon. Friends will be well able to make their cases in both debates.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Now that the Lord President has been in office for a few days, and now that we have an alternative Cabinet in waiting—or at least

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

canvassing—may we have a little more fairness in the answering of questions, for which the Lord President has some responsibility? Is it fair in the run-up to the election for the Prime Minister for only one answer to be given to every question, when there are two key contestants for the job? In the interests of balance and political impartiality, it would make sense for the House to hear the views of Ministers representing the Prime Minister and——

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's question is in the same category as that of the hon. Member for Coventry, South-West (Mr. Butcher). Questions should be about next week's business.

Mr. Skinner: I want a statement as early as possible next week, before Tuesday's election, or afterwards if it runs on, so that, instead of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) telling people in the Tea Room about his policies on education, the poll tax, housing, cardboard city, and taxation, they can be explained in this Chamber. Will the Leader of the House arrange that for next week? We are all waiting.

Mr. MacGregor: As always, the hon. Gentleman has raised many points, but I shall respond to only one. The shadow Cabinet seated on the Front Bench opposite me will be waiting for a very long time.

Mr. Bob Cryer (Bradford, South): May we have a statement on the proposed Nevada desert test explosion, which was stopped by four gallent and courageous people yesterday? Will a Minister explain how the Government pick and choose their support for the United Nations? They support the United Nations when it comes to the Gulf, but sling out its nuclear non-proliferation treaty when it comes to spending £10 billion on Trident nuclear weapons and the testing of nuclear weapons to keep them in potential operational use. Clause 6 of that treaty places an obligation on the Government to get rid of nuclear weapons. When will the Government do something about that, realise that the cold war is over and that the warmonger who has been leading the Conservative party for 11 years is under severe criticism and may be sacked in any case, and get rid of nuclear weapons and testing?

Mr. MacGregor: I said in response to an earlier request that I do not see an opportunity for a debate on that subject next week. However, in relation to disarmament generally, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will be signing the important CSCE treaty next week, and will report to the House on that matter. That is a clear indication of the effectiveness of the Government's action.

Mr. James Hill (Southampton, Test): My right hon. Friend will be aware that this is merchant navy shipping year. He will also be aware of the concern of the General Council of British Shipping that that service may not be able in future to provide ancillary vessels to support any military operation. Will it be possible to debate next week that very serious matter?

Mr. MacGregor: I do not think that it will be possible next week. However, the House will be debating a European Community document on aid to shipbuilding. Although it may be narrowly focused, it may give my hon. Friend an opportunity to make one or two points.

BILLS PRESENTED

School Teachers' Pay and Conditions

Mr. Secretary Clarke, supported by Mr. Secretary Patten, Mr. Norman Lamont, Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Tim Eggar, Mr. Alan Howarth and Mr. Michael Fallon, presented a Bill to make provision with respect to the remuneration and other conditions of employment of school teachers; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 11.]

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Mr. Secretary King, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Patten, Mr. Secretary Howard, Mr. Secretary Hunt, Mr. Francis Maude, Mr. Alan Clark and Mr. Kenneth Carlisle, presented a Bill to make provision in connection with any arrangements that may be made by the Secretary of State with respect to the undertaking carried on by him and known as the Atomic Weapons Establishment: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 13.]

Import and Export Control

Mr. Secretary Lilley, supported by Mr. Secretary Hurd, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary King, Mr. Secretary Wakeham and Mr. Tim Sainsbury, presented a Bill to repeal section 9(3) of the Import, Export and Customs Powers (Defence) Act 1939: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow and to be printed. [Bill 12.]

Indirect Tax Harmonisation and Statistics

4.8 pm

The Paymaster General (Mr. Richard Ryder): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 6762/89 on approximation of indirect taxes, 9775/89 on excise duty rates, 9776/89 on taxes on cigarettes and manufactured tobacco, 9777/89 on excise duties on mineral oils, 9778/89 on excise duties on alcoholic beverages, 6641/90 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise on 12th November 1990 on supplementing the common system of value-added tax, 6642/90 on administrative co-operation in the field of indirect taxation, 6725/90 and 8801/90 on statistics relating to trading of goods between Member States, COM(90) 430 on the general excise regime, COM(90) 431 on general arrangements for the movement of products subject to excise duty, COM(90) 432 on harmonisation of the structures of excise duties on alcoholic beverages, COM(90) 433 on taxes other than turnover taxes levied on manufactured tobacco and COM(90) 434 on structures of excise duties on mineral oils; and supports the Government's view that the technical proposals can form the basis of a single market without fiscal frontiers that is effective against fraud and provides the statistics needed by Government to control its economic policies while minimising the burden on business, particularly for the smaller traders; and recognises the need for early progress on these proposals, separate from those on indirect tax rates on which decisions need not be reached before 31st December 1991.

At the Economic and Finance Council next week, Finance Ministers will be asked to consider a package which has been drawn up during many months—indeed years. My purpose this afternoon is to explain these technical proposals as concisely as I can and to listen to some of the views expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House which could influence the line that the British Government take at next week's Council meeting and subsequent ECOFINs. First, I should explain that in the normal course of events this debate would have been opened by my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North (Mr. Maude), the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who is responsible for negotiating on Britain's behalf in Europe. The reason for his absence today is that he is negotiating for us at a Budget Council in Brussels, and I am acting as a stand-in.

Mr. Barry Field (Isle of Wight): Even if my hon. Friend is a stand-in for the Financial Secretary, can he confirm that he will resist with equal zeal the European Commission's demands for value added tax on passenger transport, especially on ferry transport, as that would have a disastrous effect on offshore islands in the United Kingdom? When discussing harmonisation of taxation, will my hon. Friend be able to consider concessions on duty-free sales being phased out under EC regulations, as that is a matter of considerable concern to British shipowners and would have a considerable effect on increases in the price of cross-Channel travel?

Mr. Ryder: The existence or abolition of duty-free sales will not be tackled in earnest at ECOFIN on Monday. As my hon. Friend says, however, it is an issue which will be considered at ECOFIN during the next few months. The British Government have yet to make a decision on the line that we shall take on duty-free sales. I am in the process of meeting several delegations of people who wish to maintain the existing duty-free procedures, as I suspect my hon. Friend does. Only yesterday, I met my noble Friend Lord Rees—a former Chief Secretary to the Treasury—who led a delegation of people representing the industry, who want to maintain the status quo. I shall meet other deputations during the next few weeks, before the Government take a final decision.

My hon. Friend the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Field) will recall that I wrote him a letter on 24 October about passenger transport.

Mr. Barry Field: An excellent letter.

Mr. Ryder: I thank my hon. Friend for that kind remark. I hope that the arguments that I expressed were helpful to him. That is the present Government position and at this stage I have nothing further to add.

Abolition of fiscal frontiers has been one of the most contentious areas of the entire single market programme. There is no argument about the objective—indeed, abolition of fiscal frontiers is firm Government policy—but there has been considerable discussion about what needed to be done to achieve that objective. The United Kingdom's approach to the package of measures that we are discussing this afternoon has been an excellent example of the Europe that the Government are committed to—a practical Europe which offers benefits for people and businesses.

European Finance Ministers meet next Monday to consider progress of the official working groups on the Commission's VAT and excise technical proposals. The proposals follow agreement by the Finance Ministers' Council last year that, for the time being, the present, familiar system, whereby goods are exported untaxed and subjected to VAT and excise duties in the country of destination, should continue to apply, but without fiscal frontier controls. It is proper that the House should have the opportunity to debate these proposals first, and that the information available to the House should be as up to date as possible. I therefore submitted a supplementary explanatory memorandum on Monday to inform the House of developments on the Commission's proposals for control of the VAT system, once fiscal frontiers for intra-EC trade have gone.

As the House knows, the United Kingdom Government have spearheaded efforts to work out the practical fiscal arrangements for the creation of a single market, so as to provide a better environment for wealth creation through increased competition and unrestricted trade. During the negotiations on the technical systems to replace the existing customs formalities, the Government have kept it in mind that the new systems should be deregulatory, simple, as close to domestic arrangements as possible and as strong as possible against fraud without involving an unacceptable level of additional bureaucracy. Moreover, the new systems must be capable of implementation by 1 January 1993. Our intention is that traders should be left free to concentrate on what they are supposed to be doing—trading.

Under the VAT technical and administrative co-operation proposals—Council document Nos. 6641/90 and 6642/90—the great majority of intra-Community supplies, those between VAT registered businesses, will continue to be zero-rated. However the conceptual basis will change, since the idea of "import" and "export" will have no place in the internal market. Instead, tax will become due on the acquisition of goods by a business from another member state and the business will show this

[Mr. Ryder]

liability on the normal periodic VAT return used for domestic transactions, with the concurrent right to deduct tax as appropriate. In this way, VAT will still accrue to the member state where the goods are consumed.

For example, a United Kingdom business purchasing furniture from Italy is currently liable to pay VAT at the time the furniture actually enters the United Kingdom, with the inevitable costs and delays of formalities at frontiers. Under the concept of "acquisition", VAT would become due on transfer of the legal ownership of the furniture and would be accounted for through the United Kingdom's purchaser's normal records, without any need to endure frontier formalities.

To avoid significant trade and fiscal distortion, special arrangements will be introduced for private purchases of new motor vehicles and mail order sales, and cross-border purchases by exempt businesses and non-taxable organisations in excess of 35,000 ecu per year.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): May I put to the hon. Gentleman a point that arises from what he has just said? If liability is to arise on transfer, that raises serious problems about when title to goods passes. The law on when title to goods passes is very different in the various Community countries. Indeed, there are differences between the laws of England and Scotland on that subject. Those differences are but small compared with the differences between the law of England and, let us say, the law of Greece. Is an effort being made to harmonise the law on when title to goods passes?

Mr. Ryder: The hon. and learned Gentleman highlights an important point. I know that that point was made when these matters were discussed at official level in Brussels. Efforts will be made to ensure that his point is taken on board. My view, although it may be proved wrong, is that there is little chance of the Economic and Finance Council reaching agreement on Monday next. An agreement in principle will, I believe, be reached at a later stage. I shall certainly ensure that my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North, who will represent the Government next Monday and who will read *Hansard* before he departs for Brussels, is made aware of the hon. and learned Gentleman's points.

Inevitably, removal of customs fiscal frontier controls will risk creating new fraud opportunities. To counter this, the Commission has proposed an enhanced system for mutual assistance between national tax authorities after 1992. That would provide the means for much greater exchange of information to ensure that the benefits for legitimate traders of removing those frontiers are not also a benefit for the fraudulent. This information will be supplied by one Administration only for the use of another. It will thus be confidential and, save as allowed by the providing member state, will be used only for taxation purposes or in connection with judicial or administrative proceedings connected with tax assessment.

Other member states, for reasons of their own, have gone for much heavier controls which we have consistently opposed. They have argued for controls such as mandatory listings of all intra-EC trade, transaction by transaction. This would impose major new burdens on business. The domestic system of audit of traders' ordinary commercial records is already well proven by Customs and Excise; we shall therefore continue to argue that, in providing information for this cross-border verification, only the minimum additional requirements for business to provide information necessary should be considered. To this end, we are considering a less burdensome compromise proposal, that traders shall periodically provide a summary of customers and aggregate sales to each.

In revising the sixth VAT directive, the basis of the Community VAT system, to provide for the post-1992 technical arrangements, the Commission's text neglects to carry forward a number of derogations, including that for our zero rates. The Commission already accepts the continuation of zero rates and its objective is, therefore, certainly not to eliminate them. It may, however, be an attempt to obtain more leverage to press for early agreement on the precise scope of the zero rate category.

Of course, the Government have pledged to protect the United Kingdom's zero rates—not only in the specific pledges given in respect of food, domestic fuel and power and children's clothing and footwear, but as a general defence of the indirect tax structure which we believe suits this country. The United Kingdom's position is ultimately protected by the need for unanimity on fiscal proposals. However, other member states with important derogations to protect also cannot give final agreement to the technical proposals. Conscious of this, we are seeking to reach agreement in principle on the technical system, without becoming sidetracked once more in the rates harmonisation argument. Once agreement in principle on the technical system has been reached, we shall return to this question and the important details of the proposals where existing arrangements need to be protected.

The Commission's technical proposals provide a clear basis on which fiscal frontiers can be removed, and the economic benefits of the single market obtained without the straitjacket of centrally determined tax approximation. Our priority this year is therefore to reach agreement at Community level on the technical systems to apply after 1992. This is an imperitive if we, and businesses, are to be ready for 1993. We do not intend to become sidetracked by fruitless discussion about rates. Indeed, Finance Ministers have agreed that decisions on this issue need not be reached until the end of 1991.

The Commission finally presented to EC Finance Ministers at the Economic and Finance Council proposals for controlling cross-border commercial consignments of excise goods.

Mr. Hugh Dykes (Harrow, East): My hon. Friend has confirmed that one of the features of the complicated negotiations has been a willingness on all sides to compromise and accept an emerging package that will be beneficial to all. I apologise for having missed the initial part of my hon. Friend's speech.

There are always special national interests in member states, even for Euro-enthusiasts to refer to legitimately so has my hon. Friend been able to clarify further the position of British sherry in respect of the proposal for higher duty rates on fortified alcoholic products, which would harm the position of British sherry? I declare a direct interest —it is on the public register—as the parliamentary representative of the British Wine Producers' Committee. Will the December meeting with Customs and Excise in Brussels, at which a representative of my hon. Friend's Department will be present look into that again carefully

to ensure that the interests of British sherry are properly safeguarded, as are the many other national interests of member states in these complicated negotiations? Can he reassure me?

Mr. Ryder: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I explained just before he came into the Chamber that the negotiations at ECOFIN on Monday were being undertaken by my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury who is today at a Budget Council in Brussels. The negotiations are entirely in his hands. Nevertheless, I am aware of the problem about British sherry, though I did not know of my hon. Friend's interest in the subject until he mentioned it. I can assure him that we will continue to do our best to protect the interests of British sherry as long as those interests are consistent with our general approach to the negotiations which, as my hon. Friend knows, have been going on for the past few years. As my hon. Friend appreciates, the discussions are extremely technical and we have come a long way relatively quickly, bearing in mind the position from which we started.

The Government have played a constructive role in trying to reach compromises. Indeed, many of the compromises that I have set out are the direct result of ideas suggested in Brussels by the British Government. That is a further example of the positive way in which we negotiate on these technical matters. Such negotiations take place almost every week, but are little noticed in the House or by the press.

As I said, the Commission finally presented proposals for controlling cross-border commercial consignments of excise goods to ECOFIN in October. There are four proposals: one on controlling intra-EC movements without frontier checks, and three on excise duty structures for alcohol, oils and tobacco. The essential elements of the proposal on controls are that excise duties would continue to be charged in the member state of consumption, with the majority of commercial movements travelling under a duty-suspension scheme between authorised warehousekeepers and traders. We broadly welcome the new movement proposal, which, as I explained to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes), largely follows United Kingdom ideas.

Common excise duty structures facilitate cross-border trade by creating an understandable and recognisable common system of classification and an agreed basis for taxation. They are also essential for determining a common system of control. The Government therefore believe it sensible to enter into negotiations on the structure proposals. However, they are linked with the earlier Commission proposals for harmonised duty rates, to which I shall refer shortly. That is unacceptable and will be resisted, in accordance with our market forces beliefs.

A subsidiary point arising from these arrangements to ensure that commercial transactions in excise goods pay duty in the country of destination—but one of considerable public interest—is the implications for personal cross-border shopping. As one part of the fiscal preparations for the single market, in July 1989 the Commission proposed an increase in three annual stages in the travellers' allowances for goods acquired duty and tax-paid in another EC country. By 1992, these proposals would quadruple the value allowance for goods subject only to VAT to about £1,100 and double the allowances for wines, spirits and tobacco.

The Government have consistently supported increases in those allowances. Indeed, we are willing to agree straight away to the levels proposed by the Commission for 1992, rather than to have annual rises. Increased allowances are an important signal that the single market is for people as well as businesses.

So far, the proposals have been bogged down because some member states that are concerned about fiscal leakage are unwilling to adopt the proposed transitional increases. We are willing to consider all compromise proposals which may achieve movement on this key issue. After 1992, in general, limits on travellers' allowances should not be necessary, but we will need some means to distinguish excise goods—drink and tobacco—for personal use which can be bought at low duty rates in other member states from commercial importations which should pay United Kingdom duty. A high limit, beyond which larger quantities could reasonably be considered commercial in intent, may be a strong possibility. By gradually increasing travellers' allowances for cross-border shopping, the Government believe that market forces will be given the scope to bring about such convergence of tax rates as is necessary.

The Commission's revised excise duty rate proposals, published in January, are not very different from the previous 1987 proposals, and are therefore equally unacceptable. Essentially, it suggests, for tobacco and alcohol, differentiated minimum rates to be applied from 1 January 1993, coupled with target rates, for which no date is specified. For mineral oils, the proposal is for minimum rates, without target rates, for petrol, LPG, methane and kerosene used as engine fuel, and rate bands for diesel, heating oil and heavy fuel.

We do not believe that such changes to United Kingdom excise duties are necessary for the single market or desirable, given the very different economic and social circumstances of the 12 member states.

The United Kingdom's visible trade statistics are gathered mainly from customs documentation, which is completed when goods pass through frontier controls. With no fiscal frontier controls, those customs declarations for EC trade will join the bonfire of paperwork. Instead, the new statistics proposal creates a link between VAT returns and statistical systems. The majority of traders would simply provide aggregate details of EC imports and exports on their normal VAT return. Only larger traders would be required to provide a specific statistical return. Our objective is that this detailed return should be limited to about the largest 20 per cent. of traders, in terms of the value of intra-EC imports and exports. This would capture details of some 96 per cent. of United Kingdom trade with the EC.

I have attempted to keep my opening remarks as clear and concise as possible, but a wide range of issues are encompassed by the motion and I have tried to cover the main issues. I believe that these proposals, while not perfect, reflect well on the Government's persistence and commitment to a practical, achievable system—an approach which has succeeded this year in persuading others in Brussels of the need to focus priorities on the practical requirements for removing fiscal frontiers by the end of 1992.

Much remains to be negotiated, and I welcome the opportunity to hear hon. Members' views.

4.30 pm

Dr. John Marek (Wrexham): I am pleased that the House has been given the chance to debate these topics. As the Paymaster General pointed out, there are many different issues and papers before us. However, although some of the issues may be technical, they are nevertheless important as they will affect future indirect taxation in Britain and the future collection of statistics. Therefore, it is only right for the House to be able to debate them. I pay tribute to the Select Committee on European Legislation for its work before today's debate.

The hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes) may have missed the first few minutes of the debate, but he has been here ever since—unlike the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Field), who came in and intervened before the Paymaster General had said anything of real substance, apart from his apology for the absence of the Financial Secretary, who is no doubt absent for some lobbying purpose. The hon. Gentleman then immediately disappeared, and has not been seen in the Chamber since. If he returns while I am speaking, I shall repeat what I have said and give him a chance to intervene if he wishes.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I am grateful for the encomium that my hon. Friend addressed to the Select Committee on European Legislation, of which I have the privilege to be Chairman. Will he also pay tribute to the staff of that Committee, the civil servants who write memoranda about complicated documents and the Vote Office staff? Is it not both notable and a scandal that the motion encompasses 37 documents, all of which were made available to hon. Members and the Vote Office but which constitute a very indigestible meal? I hope to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so that I can say more about the matter.

Dr. Marek: I gladly join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to the work of staff from all parts of the House who have brought forward these documents, but their work has meant that we ought to have more time to consider them. I wonder whether last Thursday's business statement gives hon. Members enough time to consider all these matters —especially in view of the fact that the Vote Office has also been caught unawares, and cannot collate the documents until Thursday night or Friday morning.

I share some of the worries of the hon. Member for Harrow, East that some of the banding for duties on liquors and spirits is a little odd. The band should encompass different products within the whole range; the duties should not perform arbitrary jumps, as they appear to do at present. That is a technical point, but I hope that the Paymaster General will look into it so that, for example, British sherry is not disadvantaged and still table wine is placed in a single category, regardless of its strength.

There are other little inconsistencies. For instance, the Commission's latest proposal seems to have abandoned the principle of levying duty on alcoholic beverages according to their alcoholic strength. There are now different proposals for wines, spirits and beer. Both sides of the House agree. We look to the Paymaster General and the Financial Secretary to put our case at ECOFIN and at the further meetings which will no doubt be necessary.

This big topic falls into four parts. Some papers deal with changes relating to excise duties, others with changes relating to value added tax and its collection, and others with co-operation between member states, principally for the purpose of protecting the Revenue. We must not forget that those papers are important. A further set of papers deals with the collection of intra-EC trade statistics. There seems to be general acceptance in this country that that should be continued.

The discussions between the Government and our Common Market partners have been fairly co-operative. There have been no histrionics about these matters or the kind that occurred recently about a single currency. There has been no Minister shouting, "No, no, no," from the Dispatch Box about these proposals. Yet the proposals were clearly unacceptable to this country some years ago. There has been co-operation and they have been changed. The system for VAT will not be based on an origin system. There will be a transition period, and a destination system of taxation will be available until 1996.

That can be compared with the difficulties that we had when the last European Council decided that stage 2 of the Delors plan should start in 1994. We must interpret these matters in a European way. If an agreement cannot be reached by then, the clock can be stopped. Whether one likes it or not, this simply means that discussions will continue until an agreement is reached. I far prefer negotiations to take place in a cool, calm and deliberate way, unlike the rather public discussions about a single currency and its effects on this country.

Mr. Dykes: What about the planning for a single market development with the deadline of 31 December 1992 and matters such as European monetary union and the proposal for the deadline for the second stage? It was apparently all right to have a deadline for the single market and to work out the details after the deadline was agreed, but not all right for EMU. Why is there a difference?

Dr. Marek: I entirely share the hon. Gentleman's point of view and I know what is behind his question, but it is not for me to answer. Perhaps he should address himself to the Minister when he replies or to those on the Government Front Bench in a subsequent debate. The hon. Gentleman has made a good point.

These matters can be dealt with co-operatively. The proposals are not all completely acceptable, but they are much better than those before us when we last debated this issue on 11 May 1988. At that time, the Opposition tabled an amendment and my view has not changed since then. The amendment stated that the House of Commons should be consulted in advance of Ministers of the Crown agreeing to taxation changes at European level. I say that on the basis not of sovereignty but of democratic accountability. The House should know in advance what Ministers propose to do about taxation. Our amendment did not find favour with the House two years ago, so we decided not to table it again because that would be an abuse of the House's time.

We have come a long way. The proposal for the 14 per cent. to 20 per cent. band rate has been replaced by a minimum rate. The lower band, in which the rates of VAT could range from 4 per cent. to 9 per cent., is to be retained, but it is now recognised that certain goods can be zero-rated. I am sure that all hon. Members welcome that and the refreshing new attitude taken by the European Commissioner, Mrs. Scrivener, to this matter. Clearly, minimum rates for VAT are all that is required. We do not

have to set a band rate for the top rate of VAT, because it is up to individual countries. If it were too high, citizens would be able to go to another Common Market country to purchase those goods at a lower rate. However, the matter is important and I am glad that the Paymaster General said that the Government are committed to zero-rating food, domestic fuel and children's clothes and footwear.

I wish that the Paymaster General would add to that list books, periodicals and newspapers, because that is an important point. The Government have had plenty of time in which to do that and as discussions are proceeding within the Council of Ministers in a co-operative manner, I should have thought that the Government could make this pledge to the British people. I will not go through the arguments for retaining zero-rating on books, periodicals and newspapers, save to say that it is important for educational and for cultural purposes.

When we have an agreement, it is also important that any zero-rating is not allowed simply as a derogation for a number of years or on sufferance. It should be clearly recognised that items such as food can and should continue to be zero-rated in this country as of right, if our Government so decide, and the Opposition would support that. Such zero-rating makes the VAT system a far more progressive taxation system and is to be welcomed.

Mr. Spearing: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way on a point of substance which I feel that I must raise now, as well as later. Has my hon. Friend thought about the implications of a non-statement from the Government? I think that I did not hear a statement from the Treasury Bench about zero-rating on domestic fuel, on transport and on water services—the provision of clean water and the disposal of sewage. Does my hon. Friend recollect that there was some discussion on that? Is not it right for the Government to tell us distinctly at this stage—if they have not already done so—whether they contemplate that those areas of taxation will be allowable for VAT or whether they will hold out and maintain zero-rating in those areas which, so far as I am aware, have never been taxed in the United Kingdom?

Dr. Marek: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point and I should be delighted to give way if the Paymaster General wishes to intervene. If he cannot, I suggest that he consults his Prime Minister—whoever it is—next Wednesday and makes that point to him or to her. It is an important point and it would arouse great indignation in this country if some of those services——

Mr. Spearing: Any of them.

Dr. Marek: —indeed, if any of them were to be subject to VAT in the future.

It would be very much to our benefit if all food taken away from shops were to be zero-rated. At present, there are difficult distinctions between—to use a well-known example—different types of chocolate biscuit. If a biscuit has chocolate in it, it is not liable to VAT, but if it is chocolate-covered, it is liable to be rated at 15 per cent. Hon. Members must wonder whether a jaffa cake will be liable to VAT. At present, it is not liable for VAT although 50 per cent. of it is covered by chocolate because it is not a biscuit, but a cake.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Tax the top half only.

Dr. Marek: It depends which is the top half. We have a chance to introduce a new system of indirect taxation and legislation, so it is important that it should be simple and that it should cover large categories without the need for making many individual exceptions.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Is it Labour party policy that if a Labour Government ever came to power they would zero-rate those items, and how much would that cost?

Dr. Marek: I suspect that the costs are minimal for some of these matters. However, I am discussing this within the context of changing the system of indirect taxation, with which the discussions, the papers and the debate are concerned. Some of the changes may produce a revenue gain. Perhaps we should consider banding for VAT. Why should we have 15 per cent. or zero? It is a debating point—although not for this afternoon. Perhaps some items may be liable for 5 per cent., others for 15 per cent. and others for zero. All these matters form part of the whole. The general principle is that, when making these changes, we should make the system simpler—and perceived by the public to be so.

Mr. Ryder: I want to point out some facts that may be helpful to the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek(and to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers). The total tax raised on the items to which the hon.Gentleman referred is about £500 million a year. Zero-rating would mean the total loss of that revenue. Inclusions within a reduced rate band, to which the hon. Gentleman also referred, of between 4 per cent. and 9 per cent. would mean a loss to the Revenue of between £200 million and £350 million, so the answer to my hon. Friend is that it is the dickens of a lot of money.

Dr. Marek: The amount depends on which items the Paymaster General has included in that category. I am sure that £500 million of VAT does not currently escape on jaffa cakes. These matters are complicated and it may have been wrong of me to mention particular examples. However, no one would object if revenue was forgone in certain cases and increased in others but greater simplicity and fairness resulted. I am trying to get that point across, and I hope that the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) agrees with me on it.

There has been considerable concern in the Royal National Lifeboat Institution recently. I suggest to the Paymaster General that it would be useful for him to intervene if he has figures on this. A number of hon. Members have had letters suggesting that the European Commission is about to start imposing VAT on lifeboats. I know that the hon. Member for Gosport is interested in this matter and that, in this case, he is rightly keen to decrease revenue to the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Can the Paymaster General help us on this?

Mr. Ryder: I hope that this information will be helpful to our deliberations. As the hon. Member for Wrexham may know, I have received dozens of letters from hon. Members of all parties on this issue, which concerns many people. The Government are very conscious of the valuable role played by the RNLI, and we are keen to secure the right conditions in the single market for this organisation and for other charitable bodies. The Government see no reason why the existing zero rate for charities, like other United Kingdom zero rates, should

[Mr. Ryder]

not remain after 1992. We welcome the greater flexibility shown by the Commission in its revised approach to indirect taxation in the single market. Although the Commission is still suggesting that future zero rates should be limited in scope and subject to certain conditions, we have not accepted that. That position, which was confirmed again by the Government at the meeting of ECOFIN last December, is true of all our zero rates, not just of those of particular interest to charities.

Dr. Marek: I am grateful to the Paymaster General for that explanation. The position is much as I had hoped. There has recently been some new thinking in the European Commission and during the passage of various Finance Bills we have been able to secure concessions on matters relating to charitable work. For example, we had a good response from Europe on community halls.

Some of the documents deal with the collection of trade and VAT statistics—the latter principally to prevent fraud. Business must realise that it is in its own interests and in the interests of the Revenue that there should be as little fraud as possible. That necessarily imposes a burden on business, but those speaking on behalf of business cannot simply say that we should do away with all barriers and all burdens. That is too glib, because if we did away with too many of the burdens, fraud would increase, which would be to the detriment of business.

Clearly, the statistics collected need to be kept to a minimum. The Government have to do their job. They have to be able to forecast and to plan and manage the economy, and to do that, they need statistics. Over and above that, the collection of statistics can rightly be regarded as a burden on business.

It is vital that smaller firms should only have to fill up statistics forms once. It would be quite wrong for a small business which had to fill up a VAT form and perhaps a form to allow authorities in other member states to access a database then to have to fill up yet more forms for the Department of Trade and Industry. I do not know whether the Paymaster General has addressed himself to that question but I hope that he accepts that small businesses should have to fill up forms only once in a given period. They should not have to fill up different forms for different purposes.

Mr. Chris Butler (Warrington, South): Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is coming to this point, but it would help us to follow his argument if he explained which of the five systems that Ministers will be considering next week he thinks most closely fulfil the conditions that he has described.

Dr. Marek: I do not have direct experience of form-filling so I have to rely on expert advice, but if the hon. Gentleman will bear with me I shall be coming to that matter.

Large firms may have to supply more data when the checks and barriers to trade are moved inland from the ports of entry. That may be said to increase the burden on them but that will be more than compensated for by the lack of problems at the ports. I hope that the data required will be kept to a minimum, but they must be adequate to allow the Government to do their job and the VAT authorities to satisfy the public that fraud is being kept to a minimum.

I was reasonably reassured by what the Select Committee on European Legislation said in its paper dated 14 November, which is available in the Vote Office today. Page 2 of the document says:

> "Under this proposal, each Member State would hold the listings on the data base to which member states could gain access directly, but only for details of sales to them."

If we adopt the listing proposal, perhaps listings will be confined to details of sales alone and not used for anything further. That will not be enough to ensure that fraud is kept to a minimum because two companies in different member states could collaborate to perpetrate a fraudulent act without its ever being detected. Inspectors must be able to follow audit trails, as they can in this country.

The Select Committee's paper continues:

> "United Kingdom trade bodies who have been consulted as the negotiations progressed are not enthused by the proposed requirement for the supply of further information, but they agree that periodic aggregate sales listings would be preferable to the far more onerous proposals for detailed monthly transactions sales listings, strongly pressed earlier by some member states."

Perhaps the Financial Secretary could pursue that at ECOFIN next week. Such a new system may well be acceptable so long as it is part and parcel of fraud detection mechanism which allows audit trails to be followed in certain circumstances.

I welcome the proposal to extend the arrangements whereby VAT can be charged on the destination principle at least until 1996, although I wonder whether the eventual results of the negotiations will be satisfactory and whether the system will work. I have yet to be convinced that we should adopt a system based on the origin principle and I hope that the Government will press the Commission to justify its proposals in that regard.

Clearly, it could not do so in time for the introduction of a new system in 1992-93, and I think that it is now beginning to realise that the matter is irrelevant to the single market. On the other hand, it would be useful to have a degree of harmonisation. If the Commission badly wants to apply the principle of tax being paid at origin, it must persuade us. I have yet to be persuaded and I do not think that the Commission has gone out of its way to persuade either the Parliament or the Parliaments of the other member states.

I am very much in favour of the argument for co-operation with other member states in the exchange of information. The document produced by Customs and Excise, dated June 1990 and entitled "The Control of Intra-Community Excisable Goods after Completion of the Single Market" is useful and many of its provisions seem to have been accepted by the Commission and reproduced in the various documents before us. In some of its aspects, however, the Commission could perhaps go further. Fraudulent traders should not only be caught; they should be banned from trading again for five or 10 years or perhaps for life.

I do not necessarily agree that dutiable goods that have come out of a bonded warehouse should be allowed to go back into bond for transfer from one member state to another. We do not do that in this country, although this is not necessarily a sticking point on which the agreement will stand or fall. We should get round the problem. If dutiable goods leaving a bonded warehouse do so permanently, there will be less fraud.

I welcome the fact that the Commission has abandoned its earlier plans simply to average exise duties across the

Community and insist that the new levels are observed by each member state. That would have had serious repercussions for our policies on health and would have had a disastrous effect on the Revenue. We are talking not about £230 million but about £3 billion or £4 billion. The Commission's proposals are such that there could be quite a loss of revenue.

The Commission has stated that it will insist on a minimum duty with target duties above that minimum. The Opposition can travel along that road. Clearly, we must consider health. The problem is difficult because southern European countries which produce wine or tobacco tend to have much lower duties than northern members of the Community. Agreement or duties in that regard will be reached only after many years.

I believe that some of the minimum duties are welcome, but I have a reservation. As I understand it, under the proposals, if our ad valorem tobacco duty is higher than the target price, is that target price to be preserved? Is it to be inflation-proofed? I hope that the Paymaster General can help me on that point.

As I read the documents, any movement in the difference between what particular countries in the Community levy as duties on tobacco cannot go in any direction other than towards the target price. Would that preclude our increasing our duty to take account not only of inflation, but from keeping our duty at the same percentage in real terms—or at the same fraction—higher than the target duty on an annual basis? I am not sure what the answer to that is.

However, if that does not happen as inflation is higher in this country than in most of the other European countries, any duty that we levy that is higher than the target rate would simply disappear very quickly. That would be completely unacceptable. If the Paymaster General understands my point, and if he has read the documents, I would welcome an answer to my question. If he cannot answer me now, I hope that he will consider the matter and perhaps write to me. I hope that he will ensure that the ECOFIN Council produces an answer.

I can also be persuaded about the banding of mineral oils, but we must be careful about introducing changes which might significantly alter consumption. If the proposals are accepted, there will be an increase in diesel consumption in this country. There are health risks with diesel and I would prefer legislation in that area to be preceded by an environmental and health assessment so that legislation could back up such an assessment. I cannot see that happening at the moment.

There is an atmosphere and a feeling within Europe that we should get our policies unified and harmonised where that would help trade and an understanding between the different peoples. We could refuse to take part in such a harmonisation. For example, our Government refuse to have anything to do with the social charter. We could make ourselves extremely unpopular in Europe, as our Prime Minister has. As a result of that, anything we propose tends to be pooh-poohed immediately by our European partners simply because the British produced it. That is very regrettable. We must change that because we can and should play our part in Europe certainly on such things as a single currency and possibly on such things as the harmonisation of indirect taxation and the collection of statistics.

With regard to a single currency, if all members of the European Common Market united and said that they would have a single currency, it is inconceivable that business and the City would allow a Conservative Government in this country to opt out, because that would be the death knell of the City and would cause enormous problems for British business. That fact needs to sink in to certain Members in this Chamber.

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): I had understood that the Opposition opposed a single currency. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that, if the other 11 countries in the Community support a single currency, we should automatically support it as well?

Dr. Marek: The right hon. Gentleman must not trap me into saying something that I do not intend to say. I said that if 11 members united and said that they would have a single currency, and they went ahead and had one because we were obdurate and kept taking the cricket ball home and would not take part in negotiations or co-operative discussions with our Community partners, then it is inconceivable that British business and the City would allow any Government to keep Britain outside the system. That must be considered very carefully, but it does not mean that I am in favour of a single currency, willy-nilly and come what may. However, if the other 11 members of the European Community go along that road, we have a duty to do our best to see whether we can formulate proposals to enable us to partake of that system.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Leaving willy and nilly out of it, will the hon. Gentleman answer the question? Is the Labour party in favour of a single currency? He said that it should "sink in" to some people, but he said that it was something that could not be avoided. What percentage of his Labour colleagues has that fact sunk into so far? Would he agree that the figure would be about 20 per cent. if those hon. Members were to show their hands?

Dr. Marek: I was thinking more about Conservative Members. However, the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) is seeking to extract from me something that I do not know——

Mr. Carlile: You do not know the answer.

Dr. Marek: It is not a matter of knowing the answer—the question is hypothetical.

Mr. Carlile: You do not know the answer.

Dr. Marek: I gave the hon. and learned Gentleman time to intervene. He can intervene again if he wishes—we have plenty of time. However, his was a hypothetical question. It will be a question when negotiations are about to take place. I hope that the hon. and learned Gentleman will read carefully tomorrow what I have said. I have outlined a perfectly acceptable position for the Labour party to take at the present time.

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): Before the hon. Gentleman leaves this fascinating subject, as he is speaking from the Opposition Front Bench with all the authority that that confers, would he say what the position would be of a Labour Government confronted with a situation in which the decision to have a European central bank was to put it under banker control rather than political control?

Dr. Marek: Again, the right hon . Gentleman is trying to get me to move forward into a hypothetical situation which in principle does not exist at present.

Mr. Alex Carlile: You are in trouble now.

Dr. Marek: Not at all—I stick by what I have said. It is on the record and I am sorry that I cannot provide amusement. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery is trying to tempt me into a discussion on the matter, but I do not intend to be tempted.

There is a world of difference between a central bank under the political control of one nation state and its Government, and a central bank that is under the political control of 12 nation states, and therefore 12 Finance Ministers. There is also a difference between a central bank modelled on the lines of the Bundesbank and a bank which is truly independent of political control. I shall not say which I prefer. We need political control of a central bank.

The difference between the Government and the Opposition is that we would enter the negotiations in a co-operative spirit, knowing that we would have a more than even chance of producing something that would be acceptable to the British people. The Government, led by the present Prime Minister, are pursuing policies which make us irrelevant to the other member states. That is the difference.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): In his reply to the intervention of my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), the hon. Member implied that it was possible to have political control by 12 Chancellors. Is he suggesting that as a way in which we could proceed?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Paul Dean): Order. I remind the House that, although the debate can go reasonably wide, if we were to develop this point, we should be getting beyond the terms of the motion.

Dr. Marek: I agree with you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am glad that right hon. and hon. Members have not succeeded in what they have mischievously been trying to do.

Any changes should ensure that accurate statistics are kept and are comprehensive enough for the Government to do their job in managing the economy. They must, wherever possible, lessen the burdens on trade and keep the clients' costs to a minimum. Any changes must protect revenue. I welcome the progress that has been made so far by the European Commission, but there is more to be done. I hope that, at the ECOFIN council next week, the Minister will argue his case along those lines and will succeed, without hectoring, lecturing, huffing or puffing—I know that Treasury Ministers do not do that—in persuading our colleagues in the European Community by cogent and friendly argument.

5.12 pm

Mr. Roger Sims (Chislehurst): One of the directives is concerned, among other things, with the target rates for the tax on cigarettes. The House will have heard me express my views on the health hazards of smoking and I do not intend to make that speech again, but I want to express my concern at a passage in the memorandum, which says:

"The proposal has significant implications for health policy, since a cut in the absolute level of duty would make cigarettes cheaper overall and because a rise in the proportion of tax raised by an ad valorem charge would widen the span of retail prices, offering more opportunities for selling cheap products."

It is curious that we should have these proposals before us only a day after the Commission issued a paper about the adoption of the proposals amending the directive on the labelling of tobacco products. That document starts by saying:

"smoking is still a major health problem; one cancer out of three in Europe is caused by smoking. In other words, cancer prevention must start with smoking prevention."

If the proposal goes through in its present form, far from deterring people from smoking by increasing the price of cigarettes—there is no doubt that price is a relevant factor—it would encourage them by reducing the price. I hope that my hon. Friend will take the point on board and that our objections to this aspect will be noted and ventilated.

Another of the documents before us deals with duties on spirits. Here, I have to declare an interest as adviser to the Scotch Whisky Association. My hon. Friend the Minister has already referred to possible proposals for the phasing out of the duty-free allowance and said that this is not an immediate matter, but it is clear that it is under consideration and could come in the fullness of time. The duty-free market is a special market and were it abolished, it would not be replaced elsewhere. All of us have experience of taking advantage of duty-free sales to purchase a product that we would not otherwise have purchased. If duty-free sales are abolished, the market is lost. For the Scotch whisky industry, if the duty-free market were to go within the Community, that would mean lost sales to the value of £40 million per annum. That is the equivalent of the loss of a complete market such as that in Germany.

Furthermore, it seems that the Commission is now moving from the original ideas of harmonisation on duty levels on alcohol products. The very effect of the proposal is to maintain discrimination between duty on spirits and the duty on wine. It does no more than maintain it, because, as an explanatory memorandum says:

"The ratio between the duties on spirits and wine would increase from about 2:1"—

that is unreasonable in itself—

"to about 8:1, with possible adverse consequences for UK spirits producers, both in terms of the domestic market and exports to the EC."

That discrimination of 8:1 between spirits and wines does not chime with the idea of a single market. Therefore, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to stress again that consideration should be given to proper harmonisation of the duties on alcoholic products and, ideally, that the duties should be based on the alcoholic strength of the product, regardless of its nature.

5.18 pm

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): My right hon. and hon. Friends and I broadly support the view expressed by the Paymaster General about these documents. However, I wish to draw the attention of the House to a number of matters. The first relates to tax points for VAT and the matter that I raised earlier in an intervention about the title to goods. There is already a minefield in domestic law relating to the question of when title to goods passes. It is difficult to determine even where the dispute is between a United Kingdom supplier and a United Kingdom purchaser. Already, there is a great deal of case law on the

passing of title to goods where there is a transaction across international frontiers. When VAT law is harmonised, it is important that we do not face an exponentially increased minefield. It might be of great benefit to my colleagues at the commercial Bar, but I doubt whether it would be of much benefit to those traders whose interests we are trying to serve by the single market and harmonisation.

Attempts at harmonisation of the taxation regimes of the European Community and the achievement of harmony within the Community are as different, unfortunately, as my singing in the bath and the heavenly sounds of the Bach choir. On the face of it, I suppose that the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) presents a slightly more hopeful prognosis for harmony, yet that is little comfort as I suppose that realistically we must regard him merely as the leadership candidate who is seen but not Hurd.

It is time that the Government, carefully and rightly avoiding slavish acceptance of all Commission suggestions, began to demonstrate a wish to make effective the concept of Europe of which the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) spoke with such eloquence on Tuesday. Unfortunately, as we have heard in the debate—I am pleased that the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), having left the Chamber to have his bruised fingers bandaged, to use a cricketing analogy, has now returned to his place—it is clear that we would not obtain any greater clarity of commitment from the Labour party, which is riddled both with deeply committed anti-Europeans and pragmatists, as well as with wholesale consumers of fudge. That is as destructive a combination as one could imagine when it comes to making real progress.

In the Labour party there are three schools of thought —some committed pro-Europeans, some committed anti-Europeans like the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing)—the hon. Gentleman does not make his position unclear—and those who spend their time sitting on the fence, like the hon. Member for Wrexham. I fear that the iron may well have already entered his soul on the subject of Europe and that we shall have no greater clarity from the Opposition Front Bench between now and the result of the next general election than we have had in recent years.

It is rather like having a Government—I repeat the fashionable use of cricketing metaphors—who play 12th man in Europe, and deliberately so, and therefore rarely obtain any significant slice of action on the field. To adopt a footballing analogy, we have a Labour party which, if it were to be allotted a position in the European team, would be playing as substitute, or possibly at left-right-outside.

Mr. Spearing: I fear that the hon. and learned Gentleman was slightly inaccurate when he mentioned my position. His inaccuracy illustrates one of the problems of what is sometimes called, but mistakenly, a debate. I am not anti-European. I am a European person, but I am not in favour of the terms or the philosophy behind the treaty of Rome. There is a great deal of difference between the two positions.

Mr. Carlile *rose*——

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I realise that the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) is in his preamble, and I am sure that he will come to the motion that is before the House.

Mr. Carlile: I am, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I shall.

The hon. Member for Newham, South has made his position clear, as one would expect. He is opposed to the European Community.

It is nearly two decades since we accepted the introduction of value added tax, that being a key indirect tax within the European Community. It is a relatively simple tax, although it has become complicated by some fairly abstruse regulations and exceptions for certain goods and services. It is easy and cheap to collect, mainly because it is collected by the suppliers of goods and services at vast cost to themselves but not to the Government. It probably makes good sense on those grounds.

Although fraud is common, it is generally easy to detect, provided that there are enough staff available in Customs and Excise in the United Kingdom, and in equivalent departments elsewhere, to carry out the detection. I hope that we shall hear from the Paymaster General a commitment on behalf of the Government to ensure that when harmonisation takes place the Community will ensure that there is a Communitywide force of people who are employed to detect and prosecute fraud and are trained and skilled in that detection and prosecution. I pay tribute to the great skills of the staff of Customs and Excise, who have a record second to none throughout the world in the detection of fraud in the importation of goods and, in more recent times, in VAT transactions.

As part of our VAT regime, we have shown a determination that some goods and some services—those that make a major contribution of especial utility and merit—should be zero rated. In the proposals produced by Commissioner Scrivener in May, zero-rating would remain permissible for clearly defined social reasons for the benefit of the consumer. However, that acceptance is couched in somewhat grudging terms. It is important, therefore, that the Government make it clear that we are talking about harmonisation rather than unison and that we shall retain zero rating for appropriate areas of goods and services which are part of commercial life.

[illegible]t recognition of the basis of zero rating, albeit for a limited range of goods and services, shows that, grudgingly on the Commission's part, there is growing an admirable sense of reality and flexibility—of which we should make the most.

I shall direct my remarks on zero rating to two subjects that have been mentioned already. The first subject is charities. It is important to remember that charities in the United Kingdom are not replicated in the same form anywhere else in the Community. British charities are a unique species. For the most part, they operate differently from charities in other parts of the Community. They are much more independent of government. They are often extremely small, and fulfil functions that are undertaken as a matter of course by local government elsewhere.

An obvious example is the network of entirely independent charitable village halls which exist throughout my geographically large constituency and those of the two Shropshire Members whom I see in their places, who I know strongly support the charitable status of village halls within their constituencies and the zero rating of goods and services provided to and by those halls, especially the hiring of the halls. The halls are the

[Mr. Carlile]

backbone of village life in Wales, and in Shropshire, too. They are but one example of the many small charitable institutions in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman allow me to add Hampshire to his list?

Mr. Carlile: I am more than happy to do that, although I am less familiar with Hampshire than Shropshire as I have to drive through Shropshire on my way home, the train services being what they are.

Some extremely large charities also benefit from zero rating. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution has already been mentioned. It could be affected in two ways by the removal of zero rating. The first, which was mentioned earlier, is in its purchase of lifeboats. The second relates to the huge quantity of goods sold by that institution and by many similar charities. We can all think of examples immediately. The National Children's Home is one. Such charities sell vast quantities of goods at sales of work and VATing those goods would remove the illegitimate advantage which, most right hon. and hon. Members agree, they should maintain over the ordinary high street retail sector.

Mr. Viggers: I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for giving way. He enables me by making an intervention to avoid making a speech. As vice-president of the RNLI, I endorse everything that he said. He will be aware of early-day motion 27 which was signed by 61 Members across the board. When the Government engage in negotiations, they will perhaps win some points and have to make concessions on others. Does he agree that one area in which they should not make concessions is zero-rating of VAT for the RNLI?

Mr. Carlile: The House appreciates the work that the hon. Gentleman puts into the RNLI. I entirely agree with him and with the early-day motion, which I signed today. The RNLI fulfils a role which is unique in Europe and perhaps in the world. It is important that its position should be maintained.

Another aspect of zero rating is sometimes referred to as "books, newspapers and periodicals." I prefer to describe it as "products related to literacy." Britain's level of illiteracy and reading difficulties is still between 6 and 10 per cent. Books, newspapers and journals, despite the ever-present television screen, are the most important source of informed knowledge. Local newspapers in particular play a crucial role, especially in rural areas.

If I may be allowed to be parochial for a moment, Montgomeryshire's *County Times Express and Gazette* which appears on Friday afternoon each week, carries an enormous range of information which is simply not available elsewhere. We do not have a local radio station in mid-Wales which carries a notice board. My constituency is about 900 square miles so it is impossible to tell people what is going on in the district at some public point or by some form of public annunciation system.

Such local newspapers—in the private sector, of course—serve a crucial role, which would be severely wounded by the introduction of VAT. Furthermore, Wales is a bilingual country. Books and periodicals in the Welsh language serve as a crucial bridge between the English-speaking Welsh and the Welsh-speaking Welsh. They help to make Wales a country in which everyone can understand everyone else. Therefore, they fulfil an essential and useful function.

Minority languages have been the subject of much discussion in the European Community. The existence of a strong national language in Wales is a factor which should be put into the scales when discussions take place about the VATability of books, newspapers and periodicals—in other words, the VATability of literacy.

We support the notion and the aims of harmonisation, as exemplified by the documents before the House. We should bear in mind that in my party we aim for harmony, not unison or uniformity. Harmony can be heard in many forms, from Tallis's great six-choir, 36-part choral work, to a barber shop quartet—which is probably the most that we could ever achieve in the House. But harmony is different from expecting everyone to say the same, adopt the same rules and provide exactly the same tax for every aspect of life.

Whether one uses the term federalism or retention of sovereignty—the two are often difficult to distinguish—it is important that harmonisation means that local circumstances, traditions and needs, such as those of the RNLI, which is peculiar to the United Kingdom because we are a group of islands, should be taken fully into account. Therefore, the reason why we have chosen to zero-rate particular goods and services is an essential inclusion in any negotiations.

5.35 pm

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): In a desire for virtue and brevity, I shall be brief, partly because what my hon. Friend the Minister said was encouraging and to a great extent he covered in spirit the essential points that I wanted to make. I wish to refer to the VAT controls on inter-Community trade post-1992. I declare an interest which is duly recorded. I am involved in trading companies which would be affected by legislation on this matter.

I have a real and growing anxiety, voiced recently by the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors and the Union des Industries de la Communauté Europeene, the Communitywide organisation, about the choice between the five systems. The matter is on the agenda for 19 November. I hope that I understood my hon. Friend the Minister correctly when he said that he did not anticipate that a final decision would be made then.

I am extremely pleased to hear that. There are grounds for anxiety that a decision might be rushed into prematurely in favour of system 3, which appears to be a front runner at present. I do not need to go into the detailed arguments. My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that there are fears that the system could involve excessive cost, excessive flow of information, not all of which is relevant to the tasks that it seeks to achieve and that the form of the information and the way in which it is compiled and used could give rise to mis-matches. There are serious worries that system three is defective.

I was pleased to hear my hon. Friend the Minister refer to his acceptance of audit-based controls. The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) likewise accepted that principle. It is the guiding principle behind system five. Therefore, I hope that my hon. Friend will take to heart the worries about system three. Let us hope that there will

be time for consultation before a decision is made. In my judgment, that decision should not be in favour of the third system.

5.37 pm

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I intervened earlier in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) to remark on the number of documents before the House today. I must confess that I came into the Chamber only to listen and perhaps to clarify some of the complex matters before us. My Committee has had the opportunity of reporting on them, but in view of what has been said—or rather, what has not been said—I sought to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The debate is far more important than the attendance in the House today suggests. Indeed, it is inversely important. I call it "a debate" but in effect we are having three debates in one—I should be glad if the Paymaster General would correct any of these hazards—in that we are debating the future of British excise on alcohol, tobacco, and fuel oils, particularly for motor cars. A debate on a specific proposal relating to any of those topics could fill the Chamber. We are having a debate on VAT and on whether we should retain or whether we can retain our zero-rating. Most hon. Members who have spoken have already referred to that. Again, a specific debate on that aspect would fill the Chamber. We are also debating the arrangements within the European Community for future interstate arrangements for VAT and the question of trading statistics. If frontiers disappear, exports and imports must also disappear. That, too, is a fairly big topic, especially as we are not doing too well in that regard.

All those matters are contained in no fewer than 37 documents—supplied through the efficiency of the Deliverer of the Vote, who is rarely mentioned in this place, but to whom I pay tribute—which have a bearing on no fewer than 14 documents arising from the Commission itself.

We are often told by the media and by our colleagues about the terrible, boring debates which take place late at night after 10.30 pm and which no hon. Member ever attends. People often ask, "Why can we not have these important debates earlier in the afternoon?" Well, today we have just such a debate on the topics that I have listed. A colleague has suggested that the absence of hon. Members from the Chamber is due to the fact that half the House is away canvassing and the other half laughing. Be that as it may, I find this state of affairs seriously ironic. The important and possibly epoch-making speech that we heard in the Chamber only two days ago was about these very matters—about style, approach and fundamentals.

I fear that in two or three years, when the results of some of these proposals are known, there may be debates in the House in which there is retribution, wringing of hands, mystification and possibly resignations. Some hon. Member will ask, "How did all this happen?" Another will reply, "It was debated on the Thursday of the week when the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) made his speech."

We have been here before—in the late 1970s. I remember a debate conducted, I believe, by my then right hon. Friend Joel Barnett, now Lord Barnett, in which the then hon. Member for Southampton, Test and myself pressed him on certain matters and he, in his efficient way, was dodging a bit. Ten years later, VAT was imposed on housing repairs. Nobody could understand why the Chancellor of the Exchequer did what he did. Nobody told the House that the Chancellor had received a letter from the Commission—we got that out of him later in Committee. We then had VAT on glasses, with a court order and statements, and then on commercial building and many civil engineering constructions. All those things arose as a result of a debate held 10 years earlier.

The implementation of the proposals that we are considering in this debate is rather closer than that. As I understand it, the proposers hope that the proposals will come into effect as soon as possible, with a transitional period until the end of 1992 and something more permanent in 1993 and thereafter. Although I fancy that there will be a bit of delay, even if the proposals are implemented in the Budget of 1993, that is close enough.

As I have said, the debate is of much greater importance than many colleagues have yet understood. I do not blame them for that entirely because most things about the Community are wrapped in mystery either until much later or until those who have the privilege of having someone to help them understand these things try to explain what they are all about. As Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, I have that obligation this afternoon. I shall therefore do something which may be very boring, but which is necessary. I shall read into the record a list of the reports of the Select Committee on European Legislation and where they may be found so that those who read the report of this debate will at least be able to see something of the importance of what is going on and can read the documents.

Our first report bearing on this debate was the 11th report of the 1989-90 Session, HC II—xi, in which we dealt with exise duty rates and EEC documents 9775/89, 9776/89, 9777/89 and 9778/89. Our second report was the 31st report of the Session, HC II—xxxi, on indirect taxes (administrative co-operation), dealing with EEC document 6642/90, and that on value added tax, 6641/90. We then considered the 32nd report, on indirect taxes and harmonisation, 6762/89, and then an extract from the 33rd report of the last Session, relating to HM Customs and Excise, and COM(90) 430, 431, 432, 433 and 434. As late as yesterday afternoon, we considered the report on EEC document 6641/90, relating to Customs and Excise and one from the Central Statistical Office, 8801/90.

That is the comprehensive list of the documents relating to the motion. I understand that a representative of the Treasury will be discussing them in Brussels on Monday. I hope that the Minister will correct me if I am wrong about any of this, because it is difficult even for the Select Committee to keep up with the range of matters happening yonder. I understand that it is hoped that some agreement will be reached in the new year, perhaps before Easter——

Mr. Ryder *indicated assent.*

Mr. Spearing: I see the Minister nodding. Whether the House will have a further opportunity to discuss these matters is very much open to question. Indeed, I believe that according to the revised motion which was passed following the last speech of the right hon. and learned Member for Surry, East as Leader of the House, we are now having that debate.

Mr. Ryder *indicated assent.*——

Mr. Spearing: I see the Minister nodding again. I make no apology for my more measured tone when I say that that emphasises the importance of this occasion.

I confess to the views to which the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) has drawn the attention of the House. I shall now depart from an entirely objective stance and select matters which I believe are accurate and correct but which I know that some hon. Members will say reflect my own position, which is well known. I therefore take off my Chairman's hat and put on that of the hon. Member for Newham, South.

I believe that these proposals replace those of Lord Cockfield—a name from the past. In the Cockfield report, 290-odd regulations and draft directives created the so-called "1992 single market". We are nearing the completion of that list as its provisions are now coming into force—we do not have to wait for any big bang. The proposals relating to VAT and excise duty were particularly contentious. We debated them some time ago and I believe that it is true to say that they did not find acceptance throughout the Community for one reason or another, which is understandable because Lord Cockfield was probably being too ambitious.

I am no expert in this matter, but I appreciate that trying to reconcile the VAT structures of Ireland, Denmark and Italy, for example, stretches the imagination and political ingenuity of anyone concerned. The deep interests within each of those countries, their political structures, and the assumptions of their populations are difficult to reconcile—let alone those of the United Kingdom and the attitudes to taxation which are habitually and justifiably held by our friends in France and Germany. All that is being done to the great god of the benefits of harmonisation, although I am not sure that they have been agreed or even estimated.

The new VAT proposals would create two bands. I will first read into the record the Government's attitude, although the Paymaster-General has already made it clear. The Explanatory Memorandum relating to document 6762 of 1989, signed by the then Economic Secretary to the Treasury, states on page 4:

"The move away from both the fixed band for the standard rate of VAT and fixed rates for excise is welcome, as is the Commission's acceptance that certain zero rates may be retained on social grounds, though the list of items to be included is not indicated. But the Commission's long-term aim remains the centrally imposed approximation of indirect tax rates, which the United Kingdom Government continues to believe to be unnecessary and inappropriate."

That is a clear statement, not shouted or discourteous. The key is that the list of items affected is not indicated, and nor are the precise figures, although I make no complaint about that as a technique.

When VAT was first introduced and was subsequently doubled, there were many great debates. We are now considering an adjustment to our 15 per cent. standard rate, and ingenious proposals for what amounts to a double band. I am not sure whether that arrangement is meant to be transitional or to operate after 1993, but I do not suppose that that makes such difference, because the all-important timing has yet to be decided.

There is to be a standard rate somewhat above 9 per cent., but the minimum amount above 9 per cent. has yet to be decided. It could be 12, 13 or 14 per cent. Each country will be allowed to impose a higher rate if it suits its convenience and accords with certain desiderata. Commission document No. 6762/89, published on 22 May 1989, states in paragraph 8:

"An alternative to the rate band would be to replace it with a minimum rate applicable from 1 January 1993 without any upper limit being set for Member States' needs in so far as the standard rate is concerned. Each Member State would choose a rate at least equal to the minimum rate, having regard not only to the national budgetary implications of its choice but also to the 'competitive pressure' that would stem from the rates chosen by neighbouring Member States or by the Member States which were its main trading partners."

That is the suggested criterion for the standard rate, which would apply to almost everything.

There is a proposal also for a reduced rate. Paragraph 10 of the same document states:

"The Commission considers that the proposed band (4-9 per cent.) best meets the needs of the situation and that the essential task is to agree on the products to be taxed at the reduced rate relative to those chargeable at the standard rate. For the Commission, it is indispensible to reach agreement from the outset of the prepatory phase on the fact that a common structure based on two rates is the necessary condition for attaining a sufficient degree of alignment."

Some may consider that proposal a little fuzzy, but we can see what the Commission is driving at. I understand that that is the document on which negotiations are to take place. Some may welcome the ability to reduce VAT on certain commodities or services, but I reckon that the reduced rate will be fairly limited. It is more likely that certain goods which are currently zero-rated will be lifted into the 4 per cent. to 9 per cent. tax band, with a minimum of 4 per cent.

That brings me to the vexed question of zero-rated commodities. It is notable that hon. Members who have spoken so far who might otherwise be in favour of the procrustean harmonisation thrust upon us by the treaty of Rome pointed out the need to retain zero rating, which was the subject of my earlier intervention in the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek), in respect of the Government's intentions.

Perhaps we should get that issue out of the way immediately. The Prime Minister said something about it at the time of the last general election. I do not know whether she was supported in her view then by the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) or by the right hon. and learned Member for Surrey, East, but I suspect that she was. I refer to the question of children's shoes, and so on. But what about transport, domestic fuel, water supply and disposal, books, magazines and newspapers, referred to by the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile), and with whose remarks I wholly agree.

I understand the Prime Minister's position and her resentment on occasions. At the time of the general election, neither she nor the Chancellor of the Exchequer could give an undertaking—any more than they can now—that books, magazines and newspapers would never be taxed. That situation already confronts the Government and the public. I referred earlier to the relative obscurity of debates on technical documents having long numbers. I make no apology for commenting now that there does not appear to be for this debate any representative from this country's great newspapers in the Press Gallery at a time when we are debating whether or not there should be a tax imposed on this country's newspapers in the future. Important matters are debated in the House without the public realising their importance. If the Minister wishes to

intervene at this point, I shall certainly give way. If not, I will describe the Commission's general views on zero rating.

Zero rating was something of a derogation in any case because there is a big difference between exemption and zero rating. We achieved exemption for certain goods through the good wheeze of zero rating. In 1970 or 1971, before we even joined the EEC, the House had a great debate on the subject of VAT on children's shoes. I remember that my noble Friend Lord Barnett moved an amendment to exempt them, the right hon. Member for Finchley (Mrs. Thatcher) voted against and there was a tremendous row.

We may be able to retain that exemption, but what about other commodities? Page 5 of the 22 May letter states:

"Since there is a twofold need to reduce the present coverage of zero-rating"—

there we are, they are talking of reductions—

"and to take account of the social role assigned to VAT in some Member States, a relaxation of the Commission's position could be envisaged provided a number of conditions were met.

It would be necessary, in the framework of a final compromise, to authorise Member States who so wish, to maintain zero-rating for a very limited number of products currently subject to the reduced rates, provided this did not pose any risks of distortion of competition for the other Member States."

That is a big proviso and it means that zero rating in one state and the standard rate in the neighbouring state would be regarded as a distortion of trade under the relevant article of the treaty, and people could be taken to the European Court as a result.

Even if we want zero rating on some commodities, it might be difficult. For example, if water is free of VAT in one country, production costs would undoubtedly be lowered for certain products, and that could result in court proceedings.

The section in the document on excise is specific in meaning but obscure in its language. When Lord Cockfield produced the proposals on harmonisation of excise, great attention was paid to changes in alcohol excise duty. The Paymaster General may correct me if I am wrong, but there were staggering reductions in the duty on certain alcoholic drinks, favouring products with a high alcohol content—such as spirits. Beer came off least well.

There were great reductions which put down the cost of alcohol remarkably—by 30 per cent. in some instances—because our excise duty had to be reduced considerably to harmonise with the rest of the European Community. That was one of the reasons why the Cockfield proposals were withdrawn. I understand that the Treasury stood to lose between £3 billion and £4 billion because of the reductions in alcohol duty. I give those figures from memory—the Paymaster General can correct me and perhaps give his estimate of the range of revenue loss to the Treasury under the present proposals.

I am not as worried as other hon. Members may be about the loss of taxation. Taxation of alcohol has been a part of social policy in this country, whether one likes it or not. I mentioned that fact to an EC official, and he told me that social policy comes under another article of the treaty of Rome—that is the way some people view these issues.

I shall read the letter of the proposal and then try to interpret it. The Minister can correct me if I am wrong. Paragraph 23 states:

"The Commission will propose that differentiated minimum rates, which would vary according to the principal products, should be compulsory from the end of the transitional period, i.e. from 1 January 1993.

In fixing the minimum rates, particular attention will be paid to countries with low excises so as to ensure that the effort they have to make remains reasonable. The solution reached cannot take the form of frontier controls.

The existence of these minimum rates would not prevent those Member States which apply the highest duties on such products from progressively aligning their duties on the long-term reference values adopted for each category of product."

That is not very clear.

I gather that the Commission is to put long-term reference values on excise on all types of alcoholic liquor. Countries with lower rates at present—especially the Mediterranean countries—can gradually raise rates to that value, and countries with rates well above, such as United Kingdom, can gradually reduce them until, after a period of time, they are more or less the same. In the meantime, we shall have to put up with whatever frontier disparities may exist. We shall have to lump it for the time being.

That is the Commission's proposal, and it is radical. I am not sure whether the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery or his constituents would approve,but it is an ingenious bureaucratic and administrative solution to what would otherwise be a difficult problem. I have tried to explain the proposal in ordinary language and I invite the Paymaster General to correct me if I am wrong.

If one eliminates frontiers, one eliminates exports and imports and therefore trade statistics. In a document relating to the exchange rate mechanism, Lord Jay said that a country with a persistent structural trade deficit is turned into a depressed area by the ERM. Scotland and Northern Ireland are not depressed in human terms, but those and some of our other regions could be described as depressed areas. We do not deal with their imports and exports. Lord Jay suggests that the entire country will be turned into a depressed area by the ERM. Does the Paymaster General envisage a period after 1993 when trade statistics will disappear? If not, what trade statistics shall we have? Is he confident that their bases will be correct?

Finally, I wish to focus attention on excise duty on energy, especially on fuels. One cannot listen to the radio or watch television without hearing comments or discussion on the effects of carbon dioxide on the ozone layer. The Prime Minister says that we must have world solutions. Others say that we need international action and that we must get moving. If that is to happen, the impact of excise duties imposed by the EC, and variations on duties which will affect the relationship between one hydrocarbon and another, will have to be considered irrespective of whether duties are harmonised.

Fuel prices cannot be market-oriented if we are to minimise carbon dioxide emissions caused by combustion in energy production. If we are seriously to tackle this problem, we cannot be market-led. In this case the treaty of Rome—in terms of market competition—will have to go out of the window. It would be for the Commission to act in a non-market way if it wished to protect the ozone layer.

I have made a longer contribution to the debate than some might wish and a longer contribution than I expected to make when I entered the Chamber. I did so because I believed that, unless I did so, it would be extremely difficult for anyone reading *Hansard* to understand what the 37

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documents meant. In a normal United Kingdom Budget, each would be the subject of a major debate on the Finance Bill. I shall be glad if the Paymaster General will correct any false impression or false facts that I may have given to the House.

6.10 pm

Mr. John Biffen (Shropshire, North): The Paymaster General has sat through the debate with characteristic courtesy and stamina. My remarks will not detain him for much longer.

The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) referred to the signficance of the debate and to the relations of the House with the Executive and the wider law-making authorities of the Community. We are still unfamiliar with how to use what influence we have. It is very much a question of influence rather than of a formal mandate.

When my hon. Friend goes to Brussels on Monday, what will be the reaction of the House? He will go with the good wishes of us all. The nuances of the debate and the tone of voice are known to him and will be assessed by him. That is all. There will be no formal vote. No Division bells will ring. He cannot even turn to his European ministerial colleagues and say, "Give me a break. You've no idea what a rough time I've had with the hon. Member for Wrexham. Don't think that the Opposition are a soft-touch alternative."

My hon. Friend knows that the best way for us to assist him is to say that we recognise that he will not have an easy task and that his job is not just to agree to any compromise that is reached. He knows that he must express the earnest anxieties of all parts of the House. To some extent, domestic political loyalties merge in a common national attitude. The problem has been made no easier in the recent past. An attempt is being made to shoehorn Britain's relationship with the Community into the unnatural fit of domestic party politics.

I know that the hon. Member for Newham, South and I share a great deal more than we share with our colleagues. It has never been easy to fit the Community debate into the niceties of Westminster politics. That does not mean that Westminster has no real responsibility, through the Minister, to make its views known on a range of subjects, even when they seem to be technical. I fully agree with the hon. Member for Newham, South that it is the volume of documents that will almost certainly convince every research assistant that they are hardly worth dealing with when it comes to the minutiae of VAT arrangements planned for the far distant future. That, however, is not so.

If, for example, one takes the VAT rates that in the past have convulsed the House, nothing will be decided on Monday. It will be just one more canter around an almost endless circuit, but sooner or later we shall have to reach a decision. What is so unsatisfactory is that we shall move gradually from the inconceivable to the absolutely unavoidable. "Like it or not" is the most chilling phrase that can be used in EC debates.

Although this is a thinly attended House, it has to be said that, unless there is a conscious determination to give up our traditions and our authority, we shall proceed not by means of farther abdication but by means of filling out our responsibilities and the opportunities for influencing decision taking in the Community.

I came to speak about statistics. I did not imagine that the debate would turn to constitutional matters, but that happened when the hon. Member for Newham, South spoke. He has done a great service to the House. I did not think that the debate would be a means of dealing with the more mundane issue of the single currency, which was the subject of a good-natured exchange between the hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) and myself. The Minister is in a classic dilemma over the statistics: to what extent do we go for comprehension and to what extent are we deterred by the cost? The Minister has to solve that dilemma.

I agree completely with my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter). I hope that full account will be taken of what he said. I am grateful to the Institute of Directors for having provided me with a brief. Members of Parliament are heavily dependent on outside assistance when assessing these issues. I do not want to be told by the Confederation of British Industry that the House failed its industrial sector, particularly as I have yet to receive any communication from the CBI on the issue. When the Minister makes his contribution and moves towards a common position on Monday, I hope that he will take account of the views expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke, which I do no more than echo.

My final point links up with what was said by the hon. Member for Newham, South. I should prefer an almost unintended benefit to emerge from this exercise. The Treasury is a most admirable institution, but I have some unease about the reliability of its trade statistics. That unease is widely shared. I realise that Government policy is to some extent controversial, but not even Government policy could have produced such a massive current trade deficit without any convincing offset in the form of an explicable current capital surplus

This is an opportunity to see how our statistics can be implemented with a degree of cost-effectiveness. I hope that the Minister will not allow his gaze to be blinkered by merely European horizons and that we shall emerge from the process with a better grasp of our trade statistics. Then, for once, the exercise will produce a modest dividend for the greater national good. In that spirit, I send my very good wishes to the Minister and wish him well in Brussels on Monday next. Whatever may be the nature of the present acrimony over the United Kingdom's future relationships with the European Community, on this issue my hon. Friend can speak for the whole House.

6.17 pm

Mr. Ryder: It feels as though I have consumed a mammoth meal during the last two hours. I have eaten about 15 courses. Now my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North (Mr. Biffen), with his characteristic fluency, has presented me with the bill. On his final point about statistics, I am sure that he knows that efforts are being made to improve their accuracy. Recently, the Central Statistical Office moved its home.

Without going too far on this public occasion, may I assure my right hon. Friend that his reservations and misgivings, even criticism, of the way in which our statistics are produced are shared by others, some of whom are close to Government. I am grateful to him, therefore,

for underlining the point. He was right to do so. Without accurate statistics, the Government's entire monetary policy could be seriously affected. If, according to the statistics, our deficits are larger than they are in reality, any Chancellor has to take account of the statistics rather than of his own instincts.

I join my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North in congratulating the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) on the assiduous way in which he always tackles these debates and reads all the documents. I share my right hon. Friend's opinion that these debates are not as well attended as they should be and it is a benefit to us today that we have been able to take part in a debate in so-called prime time. On most occasions, these debates take place for an hour and a half after 10 o'clock. I hope—I know that my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North, as a former distinguished Leader of the House will share this view—that the new system of monitoring European legislation upstairs in the new Committees will be a success. I have every hope that it will be.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst (Mr. Sims) has given me his apologies. He had to leave to attend a meeting. He raised a number of points, including one connected with his representation of the whisky industry. I assure him that I have already met representatives of the whisky industry through the Scotch Whisky Association and am due to meet them again in two weeks. I am fully conscious of the reservations they hold about the extent to which the future of duty-free allowances may be affected by decisions taken in Europe.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst was also concerned about the unitary taxation of alcoholic strength. It is true that the current duty structure is largely a result of historical developments. Governments have set out to collect revenue on various drinks rather than on alcohol as such. However, no Government have ever accepted that relative alcoholic strength should be the sole determining factor for setting duty rates, and there is no reason why it should be. Just as costs and market conditions vary across different sectors of the drinks market, so the levels of duty which each sector can bear will be different.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst was also concerned about the Government's public health objectives and the effect of allowing individuals to satisfy their personal demand for tobacco. As my hon. Friend knows, fiscal instruments are only one of a range of measures at the disposal of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to influence the consumption of such products. The Government are particularly aware that there is a fine balance to be struck between allowing a citizen the freedom of choice to consume as he wishes and the efforts to prevent the undesirable social consequences that excessive consumption may cause.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chislehurst was also concerned about unfair tax discrimination against spirits. The Government have not accepted the need for such a system. Nevertheless, it is our objective to try to ensure maximum flexibility in any agreed Community framework. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor, together with the House, will retain full freedom to set duty rates at levels which are appropriate and necessary for the United Kingdom.

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Dr. Marek) rightly underlined the importance of a point made during an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. Dykes). As the hon. Member for Wrexham knows, British sherry usually pays duty at the same rate as table wine. It is the rate that applies to all wines up to 15 per cent. alcohol. The Commission has proposed that the dividing line for the higher wines rate should be 13 per cent. alcohol. That is not acceptable to the Government, as British sherry would fall into a higher rate duty category than at present. I repeat what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East—that the British Government will continue to represent the interests of British sherry in Brussels.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North reflected the views of the Institute of Directors and the Confederation of British Industry. I assure them that officials from Customs and Excise have had meetings with the various people most concerned with the issue, including the Institute of Directors and the CBI. Indeed, a meeting with the CBI took place only this morning. My right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North is right to say that we have a dilemma because two important considerations need to be weighed. We want to ensure that businesses obtain as much benefit as possible from the creation of the single market. That means keeping the burdens on them as small as possible.

On the other hand, we recognise that the end of fiscal frontiers creates new opportunities for fraud and consequent revenue losses. If we and other member states fail to have adequate control systems, revenue losses will simply mean that honest taxpayers will end up paying more. Therefore, as my right hon. Friend underlined, there is a difficult balance to be struck, but we are determined to achieve a balance that is right for British businesses and the British taxpayer. I hope that the attitude that we adopt at ECOFIN on Monday and at subsequent negotiations will fulfil the objectives set out by my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North and my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke.

In an intervention, I set out the Government's position on the RNLI. My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) has sat through much of the debate and I should like to join others in paying tribute to the work that he has done on behalf of the RNLI.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) asked about the law on transfer of title. He is right that we have an agreement in principle as being that on invoice or payment. Detailed legislation has yet to be considered, but it will be considered during the next few months.

The hon. Member for Wrexham raised a number of points. He was concerned about whether all the returns for small businesses will be on the same document. For statistical purposes, the Commission problems would simply require the information to be provided on the normal VAT return. The hon. Gentleman also highlighted possible difficulties on the origin system after 1996. I think that he will appreciate that the Government are opposed to an automatic switch to an origin system. That view is supported by most member states. We are content to agree that the system should be reviewed in 1996 but without commitment to any change. Of course, the unanimity requirement protects the Government's position now and subsequently.

The hon. Member for Wrexham identified the need for audit trails to counter fraud between member states. I

[Mr. Ryder]

agree with his judgment, and that is why we have been strongly pressing this approach at official and ministerial level. We have achieved some success.

The hon. Member for Wrexham was one of several hon. Members to raise the issue of zero rates. The Government's position has been set out in numerous occasions. The hon. Member for Wrexham referred to the possible zero rating of chocolate biscuits. He may have received the good briefing that the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance sent hon. Members. If we tried to add to existing zero rates, we would place ourselves in a difficult position, because arguing for additional rates is more likely to create opposition to our existing zero rates and make our negotiating position rather more difficult.

Dr. Marek: I have certainly received no briefing. I intended to convey the principle that any change to the taxation system should simplify it as much as possible. When taxation was introduced, we held discussions upstairs, certainly on biscuits. I suggested that the system could be simplified or made more transparent.

Mr. Ryder: I accept what the hon. Gentleman says, but following an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport I pointed out that large sums of money are involved—rather larger than many hon. Members imagine.

As the hon. Member for Newham, South knows, the sixth directive, which was adopted by the Labour Government in 1977, does not permit the adoption of new zero rates, although I understand that the hon. Member for Wrexham may have been alluding to the possibility of a banded system. In the next few months, no doubt, we shall discover whether the Labour party favours banded rates.

The hon. Member for Wrexham inquired whether unanimity is required for decisions on statistics. The answer is that only a majority decision is necessary.

The hon. Member for Wrexham and my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North were concerned about aspects of the statistics proposals, particularly how they will affect intra-EEC trade statistics after 1992. This data is necessary for the measurement of gross national product and for macro-economic management. The Government will remain responsible for their own macro-economic management after 1992, so it is vital to continue to collect comprehensive trade data. Estimates of GNP must be as reliable as possible because a substantial part of the Community budget contribution is based on it. Those estimates will be important in monitoring the effect on the United Kingdom economy of the completion of the single market, and they will continue to provide an essential tool for many United Kingdom businesses competing in the new single market.

The hon. Member for Wrexham queried the target rates for excise. Under the Commission's proposals for the approximation of excise duty rates, member states will be required to apply a minimum rate from 1 January 1993, and those below the target rates will be required to move towards them afterwards. For member states whose rates are already above the target rates, the proposals would impose a standstill. The proposal provides for a review of target rates every two years, but the details under which the review would be carried out have yet to be decided. We remain opposed to that and to any proposal for centrally imposed tax approximation that is not necessary for the completion of the single market.

Dr. Marek: The Minister said that the proposals would impose a standstill on rates levied by a member state. Does he mean a standstill in real terms, in cash terms or as a fraction of the rates over the target rate? It is not clear which possibility the Commission has in mind. I hope that it is not a standstill in cash terms, which would be completely unacceptable.

Mr. Ryder: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly legitimate point. I do not have a an answer readily to hand, and if I may I shall write to him.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery and others identified the risks of fraud in the Community following the proposals that will be introduced on 1 January 1992. Primarily, anti-fraud control will use existing audit-based techniques, centred on commercial documentation and traders' records. Our domestic VAT control system is based on audit-type controls of traders' normal commercial and accounting records, on risk assessment and on a low level of random checks. Our experience of this method of control gives us confidence that such a system would effectively control fraud after 1992. In 1989-90, control visits by Customs and Excise yielded more than £1 billion in additional tax revenue. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery was kind enough to refer to the success of Customs and Excise, and his generous remarks will be much appreciated by those who work for it.

The hon. Members for Newham, South and for Wrexham were worried about whether the Government would change their policy on zero rates. I have already alluded to the fact that we have no intention of doing so, but for the purpose of this debate I shall reaffirm our position. We have made specific pledges to the electorate to retain zero rating on food, domestic fuel, power, children's clothes and footwear, all of which were referred to by the hon. Member for Newham, South. We neither wish nor intend to go back on any of those pledges.

Apart from those specific pledges, which were made in exceptional circumstances—the hon. Member for Newham, South reminded us of the general election—no specific pledges have been made that would restrict the freedom of action of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It has been the practice of successive Governments not to limit the freedom of the Chancellor in such matters.

The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery emphasised his personal interest in charities. I think that he was asking whether we can give a commitment to a zero rating system for charities, and several hon. Members have tried in the past to persuade us to do that. We are anxious to secure the right conditions for charities to flourish in the single market, but we are concerned to defend all existing rates, not just those of benefit to charities.

As the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery knows, charities benefit not only from VAT reliefs on some of their more specialised purchases but from general zero rating of most food, new construction and fuel and power supply for their non-business activities. The Government have made several changes in the taxation of charities in recent years, which must have been helpful to

them. The charitable organisations with which I come into contact are only too happy to recognise that we have come a long way during the past few years, and it would greatly surprise me if we did not make further progress during the next decade.

The hon. Member for Newham, South asked me about revenue loss on proposed target rates for alcohol. The estimated loss, according to Customs and Excise, is £2,830 million; he was right in his assessment. He is also right to say that the overall cost of the excise proposals is £3,165 million.

The hon. Gentleman was also concerned that the Commission had proposed to reduce the number of zero-rated items subject to conditions. He mentioned that not only during his speech but in an intervention, suggesting that a distortion of competition would result. He quoted the Commission's proposal accurately, but the Government do not accept it. However, it was an advance on the previous proposals, which did not accept the retention of any zero rates. On a number of occasions the Government have made it clear—in the House and, most notably, in Brussels—that they are not prepared to accept a loss of ability to zero rate.

This has been a very helpful debate in the lead-up to next Monday's ECOFIN. It has been a longer debate than usual; we have been here for two and a half hours instead of the one and a half hours that we are usually given to discuss such issues after 10 pm.

I end as I began, by agreeing with my right hon. Friend the Member for Shropshire, North and the hon. Member for Newham, South that, whenever possible, important issues of this nature should be raised in the House so that hon. Members have an opportunity of airing their views, however technical the proposals are supposed to be. I reiterate my sincere hope that the new system developed by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Surrey, East (Sir G. Howe) will assist us, making our deliberations far more efficient in matters European than they have been in the past.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 6762/89 on approximation of indirect taxes, 9775/89 on excise duty rates, 9776/89 on taxes on cigarettes and manufactured tobacco, 9777/89 on excise duties on mineral oils, 9778/89 on excise duties on alcoholic beverages, 6641/90 and the Supplementary Explanatory Memorandum submitted by H M Customs and Excise on 12th November 1990 on supplementing the common system of value-added tax, 6642/90 on administrative co-operation in the field of indirect taxation, 6725/90 and 8801/90 on statistics relating to trading of goods between Member States, COM(90) 430 on the general excise regime, COM(90) 431 on general arrangements for the movement of products subject to excise duty, COM(90) 432 on harmonisation of the structures of excise duties on alcoholic beverages, COM(90) 433 on taxes other than turnover taxes levied on manufactured tobacco and COM(90) 434 on structures of excise duties on mineral oils; and supports the Government's view that the technical proposals can form the basis of a single market without fiscal frontiers that is effective against fraud and provides the statistics needed by Government to control its economic policies while minimising the burdens on business, particularly for the smaller traders; and recognises the need for early progress on these proposals, separate from those on indirect tax rates on which decisions need not be reached before 31st December 1991.

Fisheries and Aquaculture

6.42 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary of State to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. David Curry): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8317/90 on technical measures for the conservation of fishing resources and 8240/90 on measures to improve and adapt structures in the fisheries and aquaculture sector; and supports the Government's view that changes in existing technical conservation measures are needed to improve the conservation of fish stocks and that these should achieve a balance between conservation and maintaining a viable fishing industry, the Government's recognition of the need to match Community fishing capacity with available fisheries resources, and the principle of strengthening the structural measures to reduce fleet size, provided that such measures can offer value for money.

The motion refers specifically to two proposals from the European Community, which are fairly narrow in scope. They concern the new-structures proposals, and specifically the proposals on technical conservation. The latter are of particular importance, as they affect the whole way in which fishing fleets operate. However, I shall confine myself to minute detail, because that is where the effect of the proposals will lie.

In fisheries, the status quo is simply not sustainable. We are seeing damage to the stocks, low spawning stocks and an unacceptable level of discards. In recent trials in the Heather Sprigg, for every 10 fish landed above the minimum landing size some 12 were below that minimum and had to be discarded. The problem must be tackled by Community action, and we shall discuss the proposals at a meeting of the Council of Ministers on Tuesday. When I attend that meeting, I shall have two objectives: first to conserve fish, and secondly to conserve the livelihoods of fishermen.

Mr. Colin Shepherd (Hereford): At that meeting, will my hon. Friend ensure that the concerns of east-coast Canadian fishermen are taken into account? They are concerned about the activities of Spanish and Portuguese fishermen who are operating off the coast of the Grand Banks—outside the territorial waters, but nevertheless in the area concerned—and causing problems for Canadian fishermen who make their livelihood obeying the quota arrangements from the North West Atlantic Fisheries Organisation.

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend is attempting to lead me about 3,000 miles adrift. He is referring to the problems in NWAFO area off the Canadian coast, which will be discussed as part of the negotiations concerning TACs and quotas on which we will embark in December. However, I have met the Canadian Minister twice to discuss technical conservation. I know that he is in touch with Brussels, and that recently relations have improved somewhat.

I can give my hon. Friend an assurance that we are attentive to the problems. As he said, the causes are related to the exclusion of Spanish and Portuguese vessels from the major Community-controlled waters because of their late entry into the Community.

As I have said, there are two objectives: to conserve fish, and to maintain the livelihood of fishermen. It is fairly easy to achieve one at the expense of the other. It is relatively simple to conserve fish by having nets so large

[Mr. Curry]

that the fishermen are driven out of business entirely. In the short term we could conserve the livelihoods of fishermen by enabling them to fish at will, but they would then run out of fish and their livelihoods would disappear in any event. It is important to keep a balance.

The steps discussed in the negotiations may not be dramatic in themselves, but their cumulative effect is to deliver a significant conservation payload. The practical steps must have the fundamental aim of improving the selectivity of the gear. It is a great mistake to believe that there is one glorious grand design or idea to solve all our problems. In a multi-species fishery, that just is not the case. We must avoid the temptation to think, "Here is the Holy Grail to solve our fisheries problems." Even if we solve the haddock problem, for instance, we may then find that another species is at risk.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Does the Minister accept that—especially in the North sea—there are problems with the size of fish because of the different water temperatures? Moving to 120 mm nets will kill off many white fisheries, especially in the areas that I represent.

Mr. Curry: I shall be referring to that shortly, and I have no doubt that the hon. Gentleman will be satisfied with what I have to say.

The requirements of cod, haddock and whiting—the principal species sought by Scottish fishermen—are not the same. Conservation efforts devoted to one species could result in different consequences for another.

Let me briefly outline the Commission's proposal. It is proposing a mesh size of 120 mm for the traditional diamond-shaped net, to operate in the North sea and the northern part of the west of Scotland. The whole top half of that area should have the square mesh, but the Commission would permit the continued use of the diamond-shaped 90 mm nets if they could guarantee a 50 per cent. whiting catch. In those circumstances, there would be no minimum landing size for whiting. The Commission's proposal also deals with the geometry of the cod end and proposes that fishermen should carry a single net.

Parts of the proposal are constructive, because they draw on experiments and proposals from the United Kingdom. Square mesh has been developed and given trials in the United Kingdom, especially off the north-east coast of England and in Scottish waters.

I am willing to credit the Commissioner with constructive intentions. In negotiations, it is sensible to assume good rather than bad will at the beginning. However, I must make it clear that the proposal as it stands is unacceptable to us, and I am fairly confident that most of my colleagues in the Council would say the same. I have done a great deal of leg work meeting other Fisheries Ministers here before the meeting, and I am fairly confident that there will be very little support for the proposal—although I am not sure what the Luxembourg position is on mesh size.

Our reservations are not limited to the proposals on mesh sizes. We do not think that a specific whiting fishery of the kind implied in the proposals will be possible. With that sort of fishery, there would be a massive level of discard of stock other than whiting—notably, it would mop up a great deal of small haddock, consequently promoting the industrial fishery. The Government's firm policy is that more and more fish should go into the human consumption fishery.

One of the most notable changes over the past few years has been that species that were once given to the cat or went into industrial use are increasingly going into a high-value human consumption fishery—the horse mackerel being a species in point.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the Minister accept that the whiting proposals might not just promote the industrial fishery? Given the interests of certain Fisheries Ministers in the European Community, does the hon. Gentleman believe that the intention might be to promote the industrial fishery? Will the Minister say clearly that it is not acceptable for 1 million tonnes of pout, small fish and sand eels in the North sea to go into the industrial fishery when the haddock quota is down to under 40,000 tonnes? Will the hon. Gentleman say clearly that he will come forward with further measures to clamp down on the industrial fishery, as opposed to allowing such measures as we have before us, which would promote it?

Mr. Curry: We have made it clear that we do not believe that an industrial purpose is the best destiny for fish. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman reads *Fishing News*. Today's edition contains an interview with the Danish Fisheries Minister in which he said that he has a good relationship with me. That is true and I am delighted to acknowledge that. The Minister said that we do not see eye to eye on industrial fisheries. Those words came out of his own mouth.

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): Is there ever debate on the subject of industrial fishing on its own, or is it always lost in the fish trading that goes on in Brussels? It never seems to be put to the Commission as an individual issue.

Mr. Curry: It tends to be absorbed into the general debate on total allowable catches and quotas, which we have in the marathon session in December. We defend vital interests in that debate—for example, mackerel flexibility is of particular importance to the Scottish fleet. The klondiking operation is closely linked to that in Scotland. There is currently some debate in Scotland about that operation. This matter happens to be of particular importance to the Danes. A balance and a bargain must be struck. That does not alter the fact that we constantly make it clear that we are not supporters of the concept of an industrial fishery, but I have to recognise that my Danish colleague has an interest which he is pursuing.

The Commission's proposals are not acceptable. We have tried them. We do not just make a theoretical statement. Boats have been rigged to tow that net and have been compared with boats with a conventional net. The boats end up without many fish in the net. It will not work. The system is not practical. We have explained that to the Commissioner. We have sent him and just about everyone else videos with commentary. To give him credit, in starting this debate by putting forward fairly radical proposals, his intention was to pull other Ministers along with him so that they recognised that something had to be done. That is a legitimate purpose. We have made clear the

changes that we want and said that this is simply a bridge too far in terms of protecting the livelihoods of fishermen and that it does not necessarily deliver on conservation either.

What is the essence of these proposals? What do we want out of the negotiations? As I said, the key is selectivity. The aim is to stop the mesh closing. To use an old analogy, diamond-shaped mesh is like a string bag containing a 3lb bag of self-raising flour—the more weight in the bag, the more the mesh closes.

What can be done? We are considering the option of rigging part of the net with square mesh, but even the square mesh is not the answer to a maiden's prayer in terms of all conservation. For example, it is not necessarily a great help in catching cod, although it is of significant help in catching haddock. The United Kingdom has 46 per cent. of the Community cod quota and 78 per cent. of the Community haddock quota, so we have a major interest in these matters. There is a clear conservation dividend in getting 80 mm square net. That is less than for the diamond shape. We must be careful that we do not assume that experiments are categorical in every respect. But they give clear evidence that there is a pay-off.

Mr. James Wallace (Orkney and Shetland): No doubt, as an ardent reader of *Fishing News*, the Minister will have seen the comments in last week's edition by Mr. George Traves, the president of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations. He suggested that experimentation on the square nets was not getting support from the top. He specifically mentioned the lack of co-ordination between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Sea Fish Industry Authority on the square net experiments. Has the Minister any comment to make on that allegation?

Mr. Curry: At the very moment I noticed the article in *Fishing News*, I was sitting across the table from Mr. George Traves and representatives of the NFFO. I found it slightly bizarre that he had apparently said to *Fishing News* that we never talked to the NFFO and that it did not know what was happening, when the date of our meeting had already been fixed. We are in constant communication with the NFFO. I met its representatives last Friday. Just for the record, so that we have no difficulties in Anglo-Scottish questions, may I say that this morning I met representatives of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation in Aberdeen and had an extremely constructive and friendly meeting in which we achieved a large measure of understanding.

Mr. Wallace: But we have spoken to them.

Mr. Curry: I think that I met representatives of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation more recently.

We wish to limit the meshes in the cod end to ease a problem of escape and to prevent the ballooning effect. We believe that certain attachments should be banned, notably, topside chafers. I am trying to use parliamentary language to describe "topside chafers" because it has a slightly titillating feeling about it. It is an outer net which goes over the cod end to protect it. It is more prosaic than one would imagine at first glance. We should also like a ban on lifting straps except in nephrops fisheries.

There is a difficult choice to make on mesh sizes. I put it clearly before the fishermen's organisations. I did not try to pretend that the choice would be anything other than difficult. We know that the 90 mm mesh which exists now is wasteful. I have said that the status quo is unsustainable. I do not think that anyone disagrees—the fishermen do not. It is clear that an 80 mm square panel appears to cut discard by 10 to 14 per cent. in experiments, but there are some signs that the level might be higher. Clearly, there is a dividend from this. If we have 90 mm square mesh, we get a much bigger saving of about 40 per cent. on haddock discards, but then there is whiting loss. If whiting escape, there is a problem with predation on other fish.

That all rests on science that is 10 years out of date. We need to look hard to see whether that is true. A new programme is coming up next year to consider it. At the moment, it is generally thought that whiting pose a predatory problem, but we must bring ourselves up to date on the behaviour of a multi-species fishery. If we have the 100 mm diamond shape, the haddock discards are cut, but there is a big whiting problem.

There are clear benefits from those proposals, but we must carry the fishermen with us. I do not want us to try to do things that appear to be unreasonable and the fishermen to say that they might as well be hung for a sheep as for a goat. I do not want them to have an incentive not to make conservation work rather than try to make it work. That is the purpose behind this step-by-step approach. We need action. We believe that there is a big year class of haddock in 1990. In summer next year, we will have to protect the survivors of that class so that they can go into spawning stock and provide the fishing resources for future years. We do not want them to be hammered, particularly if it turns out to be a very promising class.

The other set of proposals relates to structures. I shall go through them relatively quickly. If hon. Members want specific details on grant levels, I shall undertake to supply them rather than detain the House unnecessarily. The Commission wishes to extend the modernisation grants and new vessel construction grants in the small fisheries to boats under 9 m in length. In the United Kingdom, that represents about 55 per cent. of our registered vesseles, but only 1 per cent. of our tonnage. I am sure that the House will understand why I have some hesitations about the programme when I say that 80 per cent. of the combined Spanish, French, Greek and Portuguese fleet is under 9 m. There is a danger of going into a bottomless pit of expenditure and engineering an increased pressure on stock while, in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, the problem is pressure on the stock.

Increased aid will be proposed for joint ventures. There will be payment of a proportion of the cost on a contract basis so that Community fishermen can exploit third-country stocks for landing in the Community market. There are redeployment proposals to encourage boats to fish outside Community waters. There are joint ventures which will permit the transfer of boats into other waters and there is a decommissioning proposal which would increase the rate according to the age and size of the vessel. By and large, the rates would go up by about 20 per cent. and there would be a 70 per cent. Community contribution below the 12 m level.

Mr. Salmond *rose*——

Mr. Curry: I should have been disappointed if the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) had not risen to his feet at this point.

Mr. Salmond: The last few words of the motion are:

"and the principle of strengthening structural measures to reduce fleet size, provided that such measures can offer value for money".

I and, I suspect, other hon. Members had substantial hopes that the Minister was about to recant the ridiculous policy of opposition to decommissioning. If not, what benefit would it be to Scottish, English or Northern Irish fishermen to have an increase in the grant to 70 per cent. when they are not entitled to any take-up because of the Government's hostility to a measure that is part of the fisheries policy of every country in the Community with the sole exception of southern Ireland?

Mr. Curry: The only problem with the hon. Gentleman's thesis is that at present, only four countries qualify for Community grant on the ground that they have met their multi-annual guidance programme targets. All the other countries have failed to meet their targets and do not qualify for grants, so the idea that the rest of the Community is a pack of people who are redolent of virtue while we are sinners is a misrepresentation of the position. The motion shows that we attach particular importance to value for money—the hon. Gentleman would have been disappointed if I had not repeated that phrase—and we still do not believe that this scheme offers value for money. The position has not changed. Hon. Members may raise the matter as much as they like this evening, but they will not get a different answer.

Mr. Wallace: Following the meeting between the fishermen's leaders, and the Minister and his right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at the Conservative party conference, there were suggestions in the fishing press that the door was not as tightly shut as it had been. Can the Minister enlighten the House on what gave rise to such expectation? Does he have any proposals that would allow "value for money"? Clearly, that is the Government's objective. How does the Minister think that they will achieve it?

Mr. Curry: It is true that there was a delegation of some members of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation at the Conservative party conference at Bournemouth. The delegation met me and my right hon. Friend and we discussed the problems facing the fishing industry. I met members of the federation again this morning, when they raised their concerns again—no doubt in the same terms —and I told them that there was some suggestion that the Commission was considering a voluntary scheme. They asked what our reaction would be and I said that we should have to wait to see what the scheme was.

We always listen to proposals. As one would imagine, with my right hon. Friend as Minister, we are very ecumenical. However, we have still not been persuaded that a decommissioning scheme would give value for money. The Government's position has not changed at the margins of any conference.

We are seeking to keep expenditure within agreed ceilings. The Commission has provided a fiche that sets out the costs of proposed new measures in 1991 and shows that the ceiling on expenditure set in 1986 should not be exceeded provided that no changes are made to the proposals. We will watch the situation closely, as some member states are seeking to increase the already generous rates of grant and the estimates of costs for successive years have not been provided. We are requesting that they should be drawn up so that our future commitments to the budget are clear.

I must remind the House that, although the Community may put forward 70 per cent. of the cost, much of that 70 per cent. is United Kingdom finance because of the operation of the Fontainebleau mechanism. To assume that this is largely Community money is wrong; it is largely British money no matter what flag it carries when it comes into the country.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): The Minister has made clear his position and that of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Is it his impression that the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is equally unpersuaded about the merits of the decomissioning scheme?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman will be delighted to know that my noble Friend who has responsibility for Scottish fisheries accompanied me at all my meetings this morning.

Mr. Salmond: That is Lord Strathclyde.

Mr. Curry: I am aware of his name and I know his first name as well. We had a good meeting and he did not dissent from my propositions. There is no difference between the positions of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on this matter. There is certainly no difference between us on any of the proposals that are our subject for debate tonight.

Sir Michael Shaw (Scarborough): I understand that we have to make a contribution. However, under the Fontainebleau arrangement, is not there a kick-back by way of taxation benefiting the Treasury which would largely alleviate this?

Mr. Curry: There are rebates to the United Kingdom once expenditure goes beyond certain limits. However, if there is a net inflow of new funds into the United Kingdom, the rebate itself is rebated—that is, diminished by the same amount. In other words, the flow of funds to the United Kingdom abates the rebate. It is a complicated matter, so I took the precaution of boning up on it before I came here in case one of my hon. Friends asked me such a question. If my hon. Friend the Paymaster General were still here, he would confirm my answer.

Mr. Trotter: Are not we, in effect, contributing to the grants that go to other countries through Brussels?

Mr. Curry: Broadly speaking, the United Kingdom pays 20 per cent. of the Community budget, so there is 20 per cent. of British money in these grants. Similarly, whatever proportion is paid by other countries is reflected in any money that comes to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): That means that we are contributing to the modernisation of the fleets in the four countries that the Minister mentioned, which come here to catch our stocks. It is useful to know that.

The Minister did not answer the point made by the hon. Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw) who asked whether there was a return to the Government in the taxation of the grants that are paid out under a decommissioning scheme. That would lessen the British contribution.

Mr. Curry: The answer to the second question is no. The answer to the first is that the United Kingdom is not subsidising other people to catch our fish, because there is no competition in fisheries. We have divided up the Community waters. There is a British zone and British fish, and British licensed vessels are the only vessels that are permitted to take that fish. The Dutch cannot, for example, put on a brand-new beamer and fish in United Kingdom waters unless they have a specific agreement that gives them access and unless a licence appertains to it.

During my introductory speech, we have already had a mini-debate. The proposals that we intend to pursue in Brussels are realistic and sensible and take a practical approach. The fact that each may not be dramatic in itself does not alter the fact that the conservation that they will deliver is significant and worth while. It is a step which our fishermen would endorse, welcome and implement. Once those proposals prove to be a success, we may then wish to take further steps. Consensus and collaboration with the industry form part of the way forward, but the Marin proposals do not give us that basis. In very difficult negotiations, our proposals will seek to attain that basis, so I ask for the support of the House for our proposals.

7.8 pm

Mr. Elliot Morley (Glanford and Scunthorpe): I welcome many of the Minister's comments about the aspects of the regulations that are causing concern to our fishermen. To emphasise the urgency of the need to act, I quote from the explanatory memorandum to the EC proposal:

"In its report of 30 May . . . the high-level working party found that the conservation of fishery resources, particularly the North Sea, is inadequate and that the long-term advantages of satisfactory conservation of stocks is not guaranteed. For almost all the stocks for which analytical assessments are available, fishing of the stocks has increased, the biomass has decreased and the percentage of juveniles in the catches has increased. The situation of cod and haddock in the North Sea is particularly disturbing and urgent."

It is against that background that we must consider the proposals concerning the conservation of fish stocks and the technical measures that are required to make progress.

There is concern that the total allowable catch figures are not working to preserve fish stocks and I am informed that at present scientists cannot set a TAC for North sea stocks. Whatever happens in the coming round, I suspect that pressure will be brought to bear for a further reduction—on top of the disastrous reductions that took place this year.

Mr. Curry: I will give the hon. Gentleman some information on that to help our debate. The advisory committee on fisheries management has declined to recommend TACs and quotas and has suggested a method of effort reduction. We wish to have that translated into the form of TACs and quotas. The Commission agrees and has therefore suggested quota levels in the context of the Norwegian negotiations, which are the preliminary to negotiations within the Community. As yet, however, there are no Commission proposals as such for us to consider. What the hon. Gentleman says is right, but I thought that it would help the House if I clarified the point.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful to the Minister for that explanation. Whatever comes out of the agreement, I suspect that it will bring pressure for still further reductions in catches, which in turn will place further pressure on our fishing fleet. That emphasises the need for positive help.

I welcome the Minister's remarks about the proposal for a mesh size of 120 mm. There is no doubt that that would be to the advantage of the fishery in terms of conservation. The question is whether the fishery could stand the financial loss that it would face while the stocks recovered. I know that the Commission is doing its best in terms of conservation, but the 120 mm mesh size is not acceptable, and I am pleased to hear that the Minister will be arguing for a compromise agreement when he meets the Commission.

I accept what the Minister says about square mesh panels, for which there is considerable enthusiasm among fishermen. The research pioneered in this country appears to have been very successful. I am concerned that the Commission does not seem to have given enough thought to the exact location of those panels within the net structure in the light of continuing research. I hope that such matters will be brought before the Commission. Gill clogging can be a problem. Moreover, I understand that there has been no research into the effectiveness of square mesh panels in the Irish sea, in sector 7. There is also concern about the selectivity of square mesh panels, with cod in particular, although we know that it works with haddock and whiting which tend to go up into the cod end.

I share the concern that has been expressed about the EC's attitude to whiting. I am suspicious about why it is being argued that the mesh size can be smaller for whiting and that no minimum size for landing can be justified. In a letter in this week's *Fishing News*, a fisherman wrote that, in all his years of gutting fish, he had rarely come across juvenile cod and haddock in the stomachs of whiting. He argued that whiting prey mainly on fish other than the high-value fish stocks. There is a suspicion that the inclusion of whiting is to the advantage of the industrial fishing nations.

I was pleased to hear the Minister's comments about industrial fishing. The time has come to tackle the issue head-on. With fish stocks declining, and given the pressure on our marine ecology, large-scale industrial fishing for use in fertilisers and animal feed can no longer be justified where alternatives are available. I hope that the Commission will give more thought to the waste which occurs in the gutting of fish. I note that the American fleets now have fishmeal factories at sea, so rather than being thrown over the side and wasted, the guts can be collected and processed at sea, thus maximising fishmeal resources and reducing the need for industrial fishing on its scale currently occurring in the North sea. The Commission has not tackled the problem seriously enough. I hope that the Minister will open a debate on the issue, because if fleets are to be restructured, serious consideration should be given to a major restructuring of Britain's industrial fishing fleets.

I welcome the proposal to consider the closure of spawning and other sensitive areas. Not enough has been done about that. Regional fishermen are well aware of areas in their coastal patches that it would be advantageous to close at certain times of the year. I know that that is already done with some species and in some grounds, but I should like an extension of the practice based on scientific fact. The regional fishermen should be involved and we should seek their advice and draw on their expertise in deciding where closures should take place.

[Mr. Morley]

I digress slightly, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I should like the Minister to consider the development of a total coastal zone planning policy so that we may identify the sensitive areas and control disturbances caused by dredging and industrial output as part of an overall plan for the management of our fisheries. I emphasise that there is a role for the fishermen, who could be involved on a regional basis and could identify the areas where——

Madam Deputy Speaker (Miss Betty Boothroyd): Order. The hon. Gentleman is straying a long way from the narrow debate on the documents. I am sure that he will come back to them.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful for your guidance, Madam Deputy Speaker; I shall certainly come back to the strait and narrow, but we are discussing conservation measures and EC proposals and I merely seek to make some proposals of which I am sure the Minister is taking note and which he could put before the Council of Ministers and the EC for their consideration.

I can see the logic of the one-net rule in terms of stopping abuse, but it will cause problems for some fisheries where nephrops are fished as well as white fish and where more than one net is carried. I wonder whether the Minister has considered the problem of enforcement.

One cannot separate technical and conservation measures from structures and I think that the Minister recognises that there is still a problem of capacity in terms of the pressure on our fish stocks. That brings me to a point that has already been raised: given that funding is available for a decommissioning scheme, why does the Minister continue to reject the suggestion?

We have been through these arguments before, but on my travels around the country I have talked to many fishermen—to the harbour commissioners in Bridlington, as well as to those in the small ports in the south of England and to those in the larger ports on Humberside —and I know that the whole industry is asking for a proper decommissioning scheme to help it to meet the problems that it faces. The 70 per cent. funding of a decommissioning scheme is now proposed; Governments have only to find 30 per cent. of the cost. As it is, we are paying into a pool to help restructure other countries' fleets but we are to receive no benefit at all.

The hon. Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw) referred to the Fontainebleau agreement. I stand to be corrected, but I understand that any expenditure that the Government put into the scheme can be recovered through capital gains tax, payable for those in receipt of decommissioning grants.

Even the small proportion that the Government would have to find to make the scheme work could thus in some part be clawed back through taxation, so we are talking about an even smaller proportion of finance than the 30 per cent. in the scheme. Given that fact, how can the Minister continue to argue that decommissioning is not the answer? He has admitted in earlier debates that it is not beyond the capabilities of his Ministry to come forward with a cost-effective and workable decommissioning scheme. If he accepts that he has the expertise to meet the criteria for decommissioning and to recognise the faults which occurred in earlier decommissioning schemes, there is no reason why a coherent scheme cannot be introduced to help the industry.

Some of the EC's proposals are meant for modernisation and construction, as well as for decommissioning. While we have such overcapacity, why is the Commission still devoting resources to modernisation and construction? Surely the priority, should be decommissioning. Given that priority which the Commission recognises even if the Government do not, I do not see why more money should not be devoted to decommissioning so as to move towards a 100 per cent. scheme. If necessary, that could be achieved by reducing the money available for modernisation. The Government have not yet met the targets in line with the multi-annual guidance programme, because the measures that have been brought forward so far are not adequately reducing the effort of our fishing fleet. That underlines the need for a decommissioning scheme.

I noted the Minister's comments on joint ventures and there are proposals to give those ventures more assistance. However, there are also proposals to remove from EC waters some of the ships taking part in joint ventures, and compensation is being made available for that. Would that have an effect on preferential trade agreements which have been built up with third countries? I hope that the Minister will consider that point.

I understood the Minister's point about the Canadian problem and the fact that as a result, in particular, of Spanish over-fishing due to the EC's failure to agree quotas with the North Atlantic Fishing Organisation, United Kingdom vessels are prohibited from operating within the Canadian 200-mile limit or from landing at Canadian ports. If we are looking for new waters and new species to exploit, those issues must be resolved.

Does the Minister share the concern of organisations such as the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations about differentiation between the ages of vessels and their respective tonnages? While the logic of the calculations is not disputed, that logic does not seem to apply to the multi-annual guidance programme. There should surely be a correlation in terms of the calculations.

Does the Minister accept that there is a danger in the regional approach as outlined in his proposals, particularly if East Germany is included as a preferential region, with all the expense to which that might commit the EC as part of its own very large fleet? I am also concerned about the exclusion from the Minister's proposals of cessation grants for retiring fishermen. I accept that one of the criticisms of previous decommissioning schemes in this country is that most of the money went to a few owners of vessels. If we are taking vessels out of our fishing effort, there must be some compensation for the crews.

Will the Minister comment on recent tribunal cases, which have found that former Hull and Grimsby fishermen who lost their jobs following the cod wars were actually redundant and were not part of the classification of casual labour?

Mr. Curry: To clarify the point about grants for fishermen who, as it were, go out with their vessels, the Commission withdrew those proposals after legal advice, on the grounds that it was not an appropriate part of the FEOGA funding operation. The Commission said that, if that point was pursued, it had to be pursued in the context

of the social fund. We need not have an argument across the Dispatch Box about that, because the Commission took the initiative to withdraw it on legal advice.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful for the Minister's explanation of why the proposal was withdrawn. People were very concerned about that. The issue can be pursued in other venues and under different budget headings. I want to pay tribute to people like my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) who have been involved in the campaign for redundancy for our fishermen. I hope that the Minister will join me in pressing the Department of Employment to settle in full the outstanding claims of those fishermen who lost their livelihoods as a result of the fishing grounds that were lost following the cod wars.

I am a keen supporter of the aquaculture sector of the industry and I am keen to see it grow. I accept that care needs to be taken in terms of financial support because there is considerable overcapacity of certain species, particularly of salmon. Careful thought must be given to the effect of encouraging more capacity in areas where the price is falling because of the problems not only of this country but of third countries entering the market.

Will the Minister consider the fact that some countries, particularly Spain, have said that they see aquaculture as a future way of reducing efforts and the role and size of their fishing fleets? They see it as a way of providing compensatory employment. That is a welcome step forward for restructuring employment, but should not support for aquaculture be linked with a reduction in fleet capacity for the countries applying for that support? A new industry can be encouraged and that can be linked with the contraction of an industry which has a problem with overcapacity.

Will the Minister consider safety support for our ships and support grant aid for proper clothing and equipment, particularly for flotation suits? I stand to be corrected if such equipment is already eligible for grant aid. The Minister will be aware that a company in this country called Mullion has a considerable market in flotation suits. Those suits allow fishermen to work on deck. They do not restrict them and they offer considerable protection should a fisherman fall overboard. Not only are they flotation suits, but they allow air to be trapped inside the suit to protect the fisherman from the cold northern seas.

I must confess that those suits are made in my constituency, so it is only reasonable that I should declare an interest in the matter. It seems ironic that Canadian fishing boat owners are buying those suits in large quantities to protect their crews, while in this country, where the suits are made, they are rarely to be found on the decks of our boats.

The whole issue of reduced effort is linked with conservation measures and a proper and effective decommissioning scheme. We have all heard the arguments against the decommissioning scheme and about the weaknesses of earlier schemes. However, it is not adequate simply to judge decommissioning schemes on what happened in the past and on their faults and weaknesses. We can structure a scheme in this country which will meet the needs of our fishing fleets and provide a sensible, structured and careful reduction in effort in a way which will assist our fishermen and ensure that they do not suffer as a result of the restructuring which must take place.

I do not believe that the Government have given enough thought to that. They have not been serious about it. When 70 per cent. of the cost is to be met by EC funds into which we are paying, our fishing fleets have a right to expect a proper decommissioning scheme, and the British taxpayer is entitled to know that the money that we are paying into schemes is redistributed to the people in our country who need that help and support.

7.28 pm

Mr. David Harris (St. Ives): I suspect that the House might have been puzzled by the intervention at the beginning of the debate by my hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Shepherd), who has now left the Chamber, on behalf of the Canadian fishing industry. As far as I know, Hereford is not one of our main fishing ports. The explanation is simple. Yesterday, six Canadian parliamentarians came here to see hon. Members on both sides of the House who have an interest in fishing to complain about the situation in Canada. My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford is an officer in the body that links this place with the Canadian Parliament, and that was his interest. What interested me about their remarks was the similarity of the problem faced by those of us who represent fishing constituencies in the United Kingdom and that faced by the Canadians—the old problem of overcapacity in fleets chasing limited fish stocks.

There are other aspects of the problem with which we are also familiar. They spoke mainly against the Spanish fishermen and about the misreporting of catches on a big scale. I do not want to upset what I think will be a harmonious debate, at least on the Back Benches, but I have to say that I am receiving still more complaints about misreporting of catches from Scottish fishermen who are allegedly catching fish in the North sea and then counting them against the quotas for the south-west of England.

This cheating is to the detriment of fishermen in the south-west, in two ways. It exhausts the quotas for that part of the world quickly and leads to Scots fishermen building up a considerable track record of catching in those waters. That historical track record will be of great importance in the years to come. However, I do not want to say too much about that.

Mr. Wallace: Given the tenor of those remarks, is it not a pity that there is not present a single Conservative Member representing a Scottish constituency, whether or not it is a fishing one, to give us some information?

Mr. Harris: I look to the hon. Gentleman to give us information and to contradict, if he dares, what I have said.

Mr. Calum MacDonald (Western Isles): I support what the hon. Gentleman has just said, but will he be a little more specific? The fishermen about whom he is talking are generally from the east coast of Scotland. I have the same complaint from my fishermen as the hon. Gentleman gets from his fishermen, only about east-coast fishermen fishing in west-coast waters.

Mr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman has raised this issue in the House before and, although I do not claim to be an expert on the position in his part of the country, I suspect that there is a grain of truth in what he has said.

[Mr. Harris]

I happened to receive today a letter from Mr. Michael Townsend, the chief executive of the Cornish Fish Producers Organisation. He maintains:

"Most species have a certain amount of misreporting this year but the real concern is for the area VII Haddock, which I assess, and no one disagrees with me, at 340 tons out of the annual quota of 600 tons, i.e. 56 per cent. misreporting."

If that is the situation, and I am sure that he is right, it is serious, not just for this year but for future years when the Cornish Fish Producers Organisation will take up its sectoral allocations.

Although I do not expect a detailed reply from my hon. Friend the Minister on this matter, he knows my concern about it, as I have had meetings with him. I ask him to look at the situation again with Ministers and officials from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland so as to get to the bottom of the problem. It cannot go on as it is. We often complain about fishermen of other nations cheating, but the matter becomes even more serious when, unfortunately, we have to make such allegations about fishermen from other parts of the United Kingdom.

Mr. Wallace: The hon. Member is making a serious point. If misreporting is going on to the extent that he alleges, there is something seriously wrong with the enforcement of fisheries legislation. Has he any comment on that?

Mr. Harris: I agree. As it is difficult to police to perfection, we cannot have a perfect enforcement system. I acknowledge the steps that my hon. Friend the Minister has introduced, such as dealing with the reporting in of vessels. What has been suggested, in the past at any rate, is that vessels that have claimed to be fishing in the south-west have been nowhere near that area. We must have measures on that, and I know that my hon. Friend has met those points.

Mr. Curry: Let me try to lay this issue to rest, as far as possible. My hon. Friend will know that we are consulting on the proposal that, when producer organisations take a sectoral allocation in one species, they take it for all the sectors. This would get to grips with the problem of boats, owned by whomever, fishing in one sector and claiming that the catch came from somewhere else. We are looking into reporting requirements. I note his point about the track record, but I do not wish to pursue that at the moment. I am sure that he will be delighted to know that we managed to get some more cod for the Irish sea following those allegations.

Mr. Harris: I am grateful for that assurance, and I pay tribute to the work done by my hon. Friend in handling this difficult situation.

The word that will be repeated throughout this debate is "decommissioning". My hon. Friend the Minister put up a skilful defence, as one would expect, of the Government's position, but he will find on both sides of the House a feeling that the Government will have to look again at decommissioning, for the reasons set out by the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) in a fair, reasonable and thoughtful speech. I did not disagree with much in it.

We must not close our minds. We all know the difficulties that accompanied the last scheme, and I can understand the Government's reluctance to go down the road of decommissioning grants again, having had a mauling by the Public Accounts Committee over the workings of that scheme. However—I say this in all friendliness—the time has come for my hon. Friend the Minister to look at the issue again. I do not see how we shall get the necessary reduction in our fleet and in our catching capacity, as I do not see how our existing policy will achieve that. I am not saying that a decommissioning scheme must be introduced, but it would be a mistake to close our minds absolutely and firmly to it.

I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to have studies made of variations of the scheme. If Scottish fishermen can come forward with voluntary proposals, fine. My hon. Friend should look at those, as he promised he would. I think he will find that Conservative Members—there is no collusion on this point, and I am not even expressing the view of the Conservative party Back-Bench fisheries committee, which I happen to chair—feel that we shall have to return to the subject and look at it again, without commitment. I urge that course on my hon. Friend.

7.40 pm

Mr. John D. Taylor (Strangford): We are debating two revisions to regulations from the European Community, one on North sea conservation schemes and the other on small-scale fisheries vessels' support schemes. The Minister might have been right to say that the debate could be described as narrow. We are debating also the motion in the names of the Prime Minister and her colleagues. It is a broad motion that covers the balance between conservation and maintaining a viable fishing industry and, secondly, the principle of strengthening structural measures to reduce fleet size.

We are told that the amending regulations will extend to Ceuta and Melilla on the African coast. Strangely enough, that part of Africa is within the European Communities. The two territories happen to be part of the national territory of Spain.

The Minister and I were colleagues for some years at Strasbourg, and he will know of my continuing interest in Gibraltar. I ask him to confirm that the fishing industry in Gibraltar will have the same support in this measure as that which is to be extended to Ceuta and Melilla.

The debate will have implications for the area which I represent, which in this context is the Irish sea. The proposed measures for the North sea, and especially the increase in mesh size from 90 mm to 120 mm, have a knock-on effect on other fishing areas, and especially in the Irish sea.

The hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) raised an issue which is of continuing concern to us in Northern Ireland, and that is the dramatically increased landings by United Kingdom vessels in Scottish ports. The hon. Gentleman went so far as to allege that there was cheating by Scottish fishermen. I shall not go so far as to make that dreadful allegation against my kith and kin in Scotland, but I was interested that the hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) was quick to allege that it was the fishermen of eastern Scotland who were cheating and not the western fishermen. I shall have to check that in detail.

It is interesting, however, that there is such a large Scottish fishing lobby in the Chamber this evening. I seem to be surrounded by members of it. They represent all the main political parties in Scotland.

Mr. Kennedy: There are no Scottish Tories here.

Mr. Taylor: They are not members of one of the main political parties. As the hon. Gentleman says, they are not even represented in the Chamber this evening.

What is the tremendous interest of the main political parties in Scotland? In anticipation of the debate, I submitted a written question about the damage that is being done to Scottish ports by United Kingdom vessels. I shall give some figures to support the remarks of the hon. Member for St. Ives. The Minister of State, Scottish Office answered my question—this appears in column 130 of *Hansard* for 13 November—and provided a table of figures. It shows that cod caught in area VIIa in June 1986 was 16 tonnes. In 1987, it was 26 tonnes, in 1988 it was 51 tonnes, in 1989 it was 42 tonnes and in 1990—guess what happened in June—it was 809 tonnes. In areas VII and VIII—this excludes area VIIa—there was no catch of cod from 1987 to 1989. Suddenly, however, in June 1990, there was a catch of 175 tonnes.

I could continue with facts and figures to substantiate the allegation which has been made by the hon. Member for St. Ives. Although one of the measures that we are being asked to amend tonight refers specifically to the North sea, there will be a domino effect on fishing opportunities in other areas.

I represent in this place the fishermen of Northern Ireland in the three fishing towns of Portavogie, Ardglass and Kilkeel. These towns are in rural areas where there is high unemployment. The industry employs 1,600 people, half of whom are involved with the fleet. The other half is engaged in the processing industry. The rural area in which the three towns are situated earns about £20 million a year for Northern Ireland. There have been problems during the present year because of the knock-on effect of what is happening in the North sea.

Incidentally, the fishermen tell me that, although tonnage is being claimed by Scottish ports as having been found in area VIIa, they have never seen the Scottish boats in that area. They can see the American nuclear submarines under the water and do all sorts of other things, but they cannot find the Scottish fishing boats that claim that they are in our sea and landing fish in Scottish ports.

The Northern Ireland fishing industry is under threat this year for numerous reasons. There is continued concern about the lack of decommissioning schemes from the Government. The Government have yielded to the demands of the Isle of Man to extend the three-mile limit to 12 miles. Now we have the problem of Scotland, the result of which is that some of the quota is taken from us and given to others.

I want the Minister to defend the rights of Northern Ireland fishermen in the context of what is happening in the North sea and at next week's session in Brussels. The Minister said in an intervention that the cod quota has been increased in the Irish sea—that is presumably in area VIIa. The major threat lies in the new negotiations for total allowable catches in 1991.

I have with me the latest recommendations that I can find for the area with which I am concerned. This year, the recommended TAC for cod in the Irish sea was 15,300 tonnes. The recommendation for 1991 is a reduction to only 6,000 tonnes. The TAC for whiting this year was 15,000 tonnes and it is recommended that it be reduced to 6,400 tonnes next year. As for nephrops, the largest source of income for the Northern Ireland fishing industry and one which affects the hon. Member for Western Isles, the recommendation is that the present 26,000 tonnes be reduced next year to 17,680 tonnes. Some of the reductions are dramatic. They amount to a 60 to 70 per cent. reduction on the tonnage that was allowed for this year.

I conclude with a few requests to the Minister. Please stand up once again for the Irish sea fisheries. We recognise the importance of the North sea to the entire British fishing industry, and we understand that it must be a matter of priority, but please accept that there is a domino effect which affects those who earn their living in the Irish sea. Please ensure that the recommendations from the scientists are not accepted unless there is proof that their opinion is correct. There are many doubts about the scientists' opinion of stocks in the Irish sea.

In what way will Northern Ireland be represented this year at the negotiations in Brussels? We know that an English Minister will be there. We know that the Scots will be represented. At what level will Northern Ireland be represented? Will there be a Minister from the Northern Ireland Office or, if not, will there be even a civil servant from the Northern Ireland Office? Or will Northern Ireland once again not have a voice in the room when the negotiations take place?

Mr. Curry: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Taylor: The Minister can answer my questions when he replies to the debate.

I hope that Northern Ireland will be properly represented and that when we have our major debate on the recommended TACs for 1990 we shall hear from the Minister a report that the allocations for area VIIa will be similar to those for 1990.

7.50 pm

Sir Michael Shaw (Scarborough): I welcome this short, but none the less valuable, debate. The constructive way in which it has been conducted augurs well for future debates of this kind. When we first reached agreement in the European Community on fishing in the North sea, there was far from a community of agreement in the debates. Yet at the time I thought that the agreement reached by my right hon. Friends in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was a good one which provided a secure future for the fishermen of Britain, especially those in my constituency.

Alas, it has not turned out that way. The quotas have perhaps not been adhered to. Industrial fishing has made greater inroads, as the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said, than was expected when the agreement was reached. I am certain that more will have to be done about that. Certainly, inspection and control needed to be improved and, indeed, at long last they have been.

Year after year, the quotas were laid down according to the best scientific evidence. We are now faced with a more difficult situation than ever before. We face difficult times and we must do our best to help fishermen to preserve their way of living, which has often been pursued for generations—for example, in ports such as Scarborough and Whitby.

I am glad that my hon. Friend the Minister has taken up his task and that he has visited various fishing ports, including my own, and met the fishermen there. He got the feeling from them that they regard him as a pretty tough customer. None the less, they appreciate that he

[Sir Michael Shaw]

understands the problem, is interested in it and is anxious to solve it fairly and squarely both at home and in the Community. The words that he addressed to us this afternoon showed that he fully appreciates the practical problems which face our industry and that in Brussels he backs the industry fully. For that I thank him on behalf of the fishermen.

I wish to make two points. First, I echo the view that the 120 mm mesh size is over the top and cannot be sustained I shall not develop that point further, because my hon. Friend the Minister did so in some detail. It is clear that he is fully apprised of the concerns and feelings of people in the industry. I know that the industry has made firm representations to him, particularly the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, with which I and probably many other hon. Members have corresponded.

My second point has already been touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris). I was a member of the Public Accounts Committee, to which he referred. I was entirely in agreement with the conclusions that we reached in the 24th report, Session 1987-88. However, I was not in any way satisfied that we were obtaining "value for money". It is significant that those very words appear on the Order Paper this afternoon. In view of the continuing pressure from the industry and—I shall not disguise it—from my own fishermen, I feel that I should look at the matter again.

I am still doubtful that decommissioning grants are the best way. On reading the evidence again, I need some further reassurances about whether the matter merits reappraisal. On page viii of the report, in paragraph 17, we said:

"We note that member states were given options as to how the EC scheme for decommissioning grants should be applied but MAFF chose to introduce a regulatory approach with provision for the automatic payment of flat rate grants. It is clear that this was exploited by some owners and grants were paid in several instances at a level which exceeded the unlicensed value of the vessel."

The paragraph continues, but I shall not quote it all.

The next paragraph says:

"We consider that in drawing up the decommissioning scheme the agriculture departments could have made much better use of the flexibility allowed by the relevant EC directive; as a result in our view the scheme was grossly expensive for what it achieved."

In other words, we did not get value for money. We went on to note that, after MAFF had become aware of the NAO report, which, of course, was critical, it stopped giving decommissioning grants in 1987.

The scheme was intended to be flexible but the particular scheme adopted in Britain was inflexible. It worked very badly. Surely there were other ways of achieving the same objective by directing the grants to areas which were really in need, rather than spreading them over all types of boat. We wanted to bring certain boats out of service to reduce the sector.

Mr. Salmond: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says, but the whole point was that the decommissioning money was not spread over many boats. It went to a very few companies. As the geographical aspect has been raised several times in the debate, the hon. Gentleman will remember that the decommissioning money and the companies which exploited it literally went up the Humber.

Sir Michael Shaw: In modern terms the scheme did not reach areas that were in need of decommissioning grants. That is the point that I wished to make. It is felt strongly by my fishermen. I am not yet completely satisfied that a scheme can be devised, but on reading again the strictures that we made in 1987-88 I realised that we disclosed that there were other ways of doing it. All that I ask of my hon. Friend the Minister is that he considers other ways. Is he completely satisfied that there are no other ways of achieving the real objectives which should have been achieved in the first place?

I hope that the Minister will be successful when he goes to Brussels. He knows its ways and how to turn on the charm and the hard act, the good mix which is essential in any negotiations in Brussels. I wish him Godspeed on behalf of us all and in the interests of good results for our constituents.

7.58 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I wish to make some basic points about the crisis that is developing in the North sea. The noises coming from Brussels about a 30 per cent. reduction in effort will mean that deep damage will be inflicted, not only on the British fishing industry as a whole, but specifically on the Grimsby industry which is the case that I want to make. If that prospect materialises, I hope that it will not be compounded by a deal that is unfair to Grimsby, by invoking the Hague preference on cod.

The Minister gave us a bad deal in his unfair and unreasonable decision to invoke the Hague preference on haddock and to distribute it to the north. I wrote to him at the time to oppose it. The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisation—or was it the Grimsby Fish Producers' Organisation—opposed it in court——

Mr. Curry: It was the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations.

Mr. Mitchell: Well, I am at least half right.

When the Hague preference was invoked on haddock, the Minister promised that it would not be regarded as a precedent for cod. I want the Minister to keep to that, because it is ludicrous that——

Mr. Curry: I have made it absolutely clear that if we ever had to invoke the Hague preference again—if the quantities of haddock were greater than in the previous year, and if we were to invoke it for the new species, for example, cod—we would have to reconsider the methods of distribution. I do not give any undertakings about the conclusions that we would reach. The hon. Gentleman has asked whether we would look afresh if a new species were involved. From the answer that I have already given, I hope that I have made it clear that we will.

Mr. Mitchell: I hope that the assurance will be stronger than that. Cod is of crucial and central interest to Grimsby. The Minister can interpret the Hague preference as he wants, but surely he can see that that position is unreasonable as far as Grimsby is concerned. Grimsby is a community which is dependent on fishing and is in north Britain, yet it is regarded on his definition as being outside the boundaries of the Hague preference. In other words,

north Britain begins at Bridlington. That is ludicrous, because we are a community which is dependent on fishing. If we are not interpreted as such and if the Hague preference is to be invoked on cod, it will be a crime against the Grimsby fishing industry. The Minister's assurance needs to be stronger than the one that he has just given.

An allocation of North sea plaice to compensate the industry on the west coast would have a serious effect on the Grimsby industry, which needs to diversify effort into plaice to compensate for the rundown in catches in other areas.

There must be more effective control of the over-fishing by the Scottish industry to which, in my view, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland has been turning a blind eye. We can argue about whether it is happening on the west coast or the east coast, but there is certainly a problem and it almost caused talks earlier this year to break down. The clipping that I have relating to that is not dated, but it states:

"English west and south west and Northern Irish interests walked out after demanding that fish allegedly caught by Scottish vessels in the North Sea and landed in Peterhead, but logged as being caught in the Irish Sea, be reinstated as area VII fish."

That is the kind of problem that we are having.

I have tabled questions about the number of prosecutions of Scottish vessels because, as far as I recall —this is only a recollection, because I do not have the answers with me—there was nothing in 1988-89 and only something pending in 1990. That is not an appropriate response to the scale of what is admitted to be a problem, and one which has a knock-on effect on Grimsby, but to which DAFS seems to be turning a blind eye. Only proper, uniform and fair enforcement of the rules could lead fishermen to obey the rules. If, as seems to be the case, they are convinced that some are getting away with infringing or fiddling the rules, there will be a general breakdown of respect for those rules. We must be assured that the rules are being enforced as vigorously in Scotland as is the case for the English industry.

That brings me to my next point, which other hon. Members have already raised, which is that we need to get proper respect for conservation by a reduction in the fishing effort. I am unhappy to say that, but it is widely accepted that there must be some reduction. The only way to achieve that is by a proper decommissioning scheme. It is the Minister's responsibility to establish a proper decommissioning scheme.

As has been said, we are in the ludicrous position of contributing to the grants that are being made available by Europe for decommissioning schemes in other countries. The result is that other industries are being modernised, partly at our expense, and can then fish energetically in the North sea, and that we are competing with them, but are unable to get the same grants. That is ludicrous. We are not getting any benefits from the scheme.

If we were to have a decommissioning scheme, 70 per cent. of it would effectively be paid by Europe and only 30 per cent. by us, so why not develop such a scheme? As the Minister said, four other countries have already done so. The fact that the Department bungled a scheme about half a dozen years ago is no argument against a new scheme. That was simply a case of maladministration. If the Department cannot administer a scheme properly, there will clearly be fiddles and a loss of money to other purposes. It is the Department's responsibility to devise a scheme that will work and which can be enforced. It is not the Department's responsibility simply to say, "This is impossible." If it is impossible here, it is impossible in other countries, but other countries are actually doing it. We need such a scheme urgently.

If the British Government contributed 30 per cent. of the cost of such a scheme, a good proportion of that would come back in tax. I do not know what the Minister was saying when he denied that any tax is involved. There is a return to the revenue from taxation involved on the scheme, so something must come back that way.

The industry is arguing that it would accept some kind of levy to help to provide some form of finance for the scheme so that it does not all have to come from the Government. A letter from the operations manager of Tom Sleight of Grimsby reveals the attitude and concern of the industry. It states:

"The lack of such a scheme places the UK Industry at a severe disadvantage with our European colleagues in that we are unable to dispose of surplus tonnage thus creating a better commercial platform for those left in the Industry. Decommissioning also creates a climate in which remaining vessels could be replaced with more efficient and safer vessels.

We wonder if there would be any mileage in Industry contributing to a decommissioning scheme say for example on a basis of a levy of one per cent. of first hand sales value. This added to the tax (balancing charges etc) that many would have to pay on decommissioning would in our view go some considerable way to meeting Government expenses".

That is the cost of the scheme. Why does the Minister not consider that proposal and open his mind to the possibility? We need a decommissioning scheme.

It is clear that if we do not reduce effort and if we do not achieve proper conservation by a decommissioning scheme, the Commission itself will act. The 16 August edition of *Eurofish Report*, talking about a document provided by Mr. Marin for the European Parliament, argues that the current situation is highly unsatisfactory, and

"hints that central Community control of all the EC's fisheries activities may yet prove to be the only way to prevent Europe's marine resources from collapsing."

In other words, if we do not act, the Commission will act and matters will then be out of our hands.

It is the Minister's responsibility to strengthen the British position and to strengthen conservation measures by providing a decommissioning scheme, which is the only effective way to provide for conservation by reducing effort. It is the Minister's responsibility to help the industry to do that. It is imperative that he provides such a scheme for the industry.

A letter from the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations argues that, if the Minister does not provide a scheme of his own, he should

"request that the Commission put increased priority on decommissioning aid. If the Commission are intent on reducing effort they presently have the available budget and could indeed contribute the full assistance to vessels (as opposed to retaining the requirement that the Member State provides 30 per cent of the fund)."

The NFFO notes also that the proposed budget will give 67 million ecu in contruction grants—which is certainly overgenerous given the present state of the fishing industry, which already has an overcapacity problem—but only 40 million ecu for the decommissioning scheme. That is an inappropriate portion of the funds available and needs to be substantially increased, regardless of whether it comes from the Commission or from the British

[Mr. Mitchell]

Government—though, I hope that it will be from the Government. Why should the industry's reshaping be left to market forces when other countries are able to develop with their fishing industries schemes that will reduce effort in a managed way and provide for proper conservation?

A number of hon. Members have mentioned mesh sizes, and the Commission is proposing a standard of 120 mm. There has been a chorus of complaints from other interests, particularly Scotland, but I have little sympathy with them. Grimsby has always been conservation conscious , having used the 120 mm mesh, it has prospered. It seems sensible to provide for conservation in that way.

Mr. Salmond: Grimsby fishes for cod. There is a big difference.

Mr. Mitchell: Of course, and that is why the Grimsby industry uses a 120 mm mesh. It is ludicrous for the Scottish industry to urge the adoption of a 90 mm standard. I quote from *Fishing News* for 5 October—

Mr. Salmond: Does not the hon. Gentleman accept that, if one is fishing for different species, particularly whiting and haddock, different mesh sizes are needed?

Mr. Mitchell: I will deal with that point. I am quoting now an argument against the case advanced by the Scottish industry for adopting a 90 mm mesh. Research by the Scottish Office showed that 90 mm diamond mesh gear caught 693 haddock above the legal minimum size, but a lot of small whiting and haddock was also caught. It quotes 864 haddock and 525 whiting. It is clear that 90 mm is not the right size to use.

There is an argument as to whether we should opt for 80 mm square mesh, on the ground that the diamond mesh pulls out of shape and therefore catches smaller fish, or for 120 mm. Grimsby is happy with that size, but there is a case for changing to 80 mm square mesh, if not to 90 mm diamond mesh.

John Ashworth's work proves the validity of that argument, and its acceptance has only been delayed by what I can only regard as official obscurantism. We must make up our minds and not leave it to vested interests in the industry. It is no use just being negative and opposing the demands of the Commission. Instead, we must present effective, researched alternatives. In that way, we can make an even bigger contribution to conservation.

The question of Spanish vessels entering the British register is not really part of tonight's debate, but the Minister's remarks on that topic were anyway inadequate. It appears that we are caught between two EEC principles —the right to establish a business in any country and the right under the common fisheries policy for coastal states to superintend their own fishing and have preferential access to their own stocks. It is ludicrous that those rights should be brought into conflict by allowing Spanish vessels to register in this country as British, and then to catch our quotas. There must be more effective ways than the Minister has provided of restricting the access and right of Spanish vessels to register, at least until the matter has been resolved by the European Court. The risk of a Spanish incursion will create problems and trouble.

Mr. Curry: As the hon. Gentleman said, that aspect is not really for this debate, so rather than reply when I wind up, I shall make a response at this point. We did not start from a zero situation in respect of quota hopping. There have been a series of court cases, and some of them have consequences for the way in which we run our management policy. With a court ruling, one cannot escape that. Therefore, when we received an approach which suggested that we might be able to arrive at an agreement, I immediately asked myself whether I could secure sensible and effective licensing conditions or whether we should proceed with the court action. After careful consultation with my right hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and others, I reached the conclusion that we could devise licensing conditions, which the Spanish indicated they could accept.

However, that does not affect the Factortame case in the European Court, where the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 has come under some scrutiny. Neither does it affect the requirement for those vessels to register—and to do that, they must fulfil the existing conditions of direction, management and control in the United Kingdom. I understand the hon. Gentleman's disquiet, but I would not have reached the arrangement had I not been convinced that it offered British fishermen a satisfactory outcome and an advance on what we might otherwise have achieved.

Mr. Mitchell: I am glad to hear that the European Court case is still being pursued, and it would be wrong to abandon it. However, I am concerned that the Minister has reached agreement with the Spanish, because, if it is an arrangement that they find acceptable, I doubt its value to British fishermen. Why is it that our law can be overruled by the Community when no other country seems to have that problem? Are the other member states' rules so shaped, rigged or managed that they do not have the problem of quota hoppers from other countries registering as domestic vessels and then fishing the domestic quotas?

Mr. Curry: Other countries are affected. Several have made submissions to the European Court in support of the British case, and they are clearly concerned that they might find themselves in similar difficulties. Neither Spain nor Portugal has an allocation in the common fisheries policy because they entered after the present scheme had been devised, and with very large fleets. The United Kingdom does not have the vast majority of the waters that are divided among the Community, so, since we have a large number of the species for which others want to fish—although there is less of an argument about hake, for example, because of different tastes—it is with the United Kingdom that other fishing interests want to establish a link. If we see the new arrangement through, we shall be able to establish, subject to the final ruling of the European Court, the essential principle of direction, management and control.

Mr. Mitchell: I will leave it there. I am grateful for the Minister's assurance, and I follow some of his arguments. We remain concerned about predatory Spanish efforts, which other countries seem able to exclude.

There is an emerging crisis in the North sea that threatens fishing and particularly the Grimsby industry, about which I am passionately concerned. Action needs to be taken more urgently than has been the case. I cannot see how the gradual development of political compromises and concessions will resolve that crisis. Firmer action is required. I do not accept either that quotas are a way of

resolving the problem, because they are not an effective way of policing catches. If fish are caught and cannot be landed, they are simply chucked back. As the quotas go down, the number of discards goes up. That is no way to provide for proper conservation. We need a more substantial and a devoted effort.

The Minister's efforts are welcomed by the industry. He has shown genuine concern and interest, and the industry has developed a respect for him. We are grateful that the Minister has taken an active part, and has considered the proposals, complaints and problems put to him by the industry. However, I warn him that the crisis is gathering pace and it requires action. It is no use our lagging behind. We have to develop certain basic and clear principles about conservation which will put us ahead of the game.

8.20 pm

Mr. Neville Trotter (Tynemouth): There can be no doubt about the seriousness of the situation. Hon. Members are conscious of the way in which Community policy has clearly failed. Regulation and control of the fishing industry is very complex but it has not achieved its aim of conservation, which is essential for the stability and long-term future of the industry.

The entire industry—whichever part of the country it is based in—is seriously worried about what has proved to be one bad year after another. In recent times there have been no good years. The fundamental issue of conservation requires a new approach. Stocks in the North sea are clearly inadequate, and steps must be taken to correct that. At present it is a vicious circle—poor recruitment of young fish, high catches of juveniles, increased discards and low level of young stock.

Cod and haddock spawn at between three and four years old. Ideally, in a well run fishery, we should be catching five or six-year-old fish. However, the vast majority of fish are being caught before they achieve spawning age. The result is self-evident, and there is a serious problem ahead. We hope that breeding habits may change but that is a complex business, and there are larger differences from year to year. For a while we could say that things would get better, but clearly they will not get better unless action is taken.

I cannot help reflecting that money seems to have gone in the wrong direction. Hon. Members have made a number of comments about the money spent on construction grants. Money has been used to encourage fishermen to build large and powerful boats—very productive boats, which have served only to add to the problem that the industry faces. One cannot blame fishermen for taking the money that was offered to them, but now they face serious consequences because of large borrowings, at high interest rates; and the high productivity affects other members of the industry who are in competition with them.

The multi-annual guidance programme calls for reductions in the fleet, whereas there has been an increase in all productive capacity. We have to face up to that. There are a number of ways to reduce catches and a combination of them is the answer. First, there can be fewer fishermen, which brings us to the question of structural changes. Hon. Members on both sides of the House support a decommissioning scheme. Secondly, fishermen can fish less. That can be achieved in two ways—by spending less time at sea, and by using less productive gear.

There is genuine alarm at the suggestion that the Community might in its future proposals be considering a reduction in the time allowed at sea. I do not know whether the Minister can comment on that.

Most of our debate will be about the type of gear that fishermen will be allowed to use, but we must also seriously consider decommissioning. As a member of the Public Accounts Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw) contributed helpfully to the debate by drawing attention to changed circumstances and to the mistakes made with the previous decommissioning scheme. He also rightly said that, because mistakes were made in the past, there is no reason why they should be made in any new scheme devised to deal with present circumstances.

As the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) said, it is important that the industry is interested in contributing to any scheme which is introduced. I, too, have read the latest edition of *Fishing News*, to which my hon. Friend the Minister referred in his introductory speech and in which Mr. Kent Kirk, the Danish Fishing Minister, was understandably cordial about my hon. Friend and referred to the good relationship between them as Ministers. Mr. Kirk said:

> "Along with a conservation policy we must reduce our catching capacity . . . We don't want to subsidise the fishing sector, but if we really want to achieve a fleet that can survive on its own in the future, then of course we have to help them take vessels out."

I believe that that is the correct conclusion. It is not the sole answer to the problem, but it should be part of a package of measures. Whatever the package, it is important that it is acceptable to the industry, and it is more likely to be acceptable if part of the package includes some form of decommissioning scheme, to which the industry would probably be prepared to contribute.

I am not sure that we spend all the money on the industry in the right way. I have already referred to the money used to encourage people to build larger, more productive boats when we were running into a serious stock shortage. The figure of £40 million per year has been bandied about as total Government spending on the industry. I understand that about £15 million of this is spent on research. If one divides that sum by the number of working days, one arrives at a figure of about £60,000 per working day for fisheries research. A great deal of money is being spent on the industry, and we should see that it includes some support for decommissioning.

The mesh size of 120 mm suggested by Commissioner Marin in Brussels is not acceptable in the North sea. It has been suggested that the Spanish, Portuguese and Greeks support such a mesh size, but they do not fish in the North sea and they are not concerned about the multi-species relationship which exists there. In our industry, there is concern that, when the time comes to renegotiate the common fisheries policy, we should ensure that our traditional rights in the North sea are maintained and that there should be no increase in fishing activity there as a result of new members of the Community seeking to intrude on our traditional markets.

The case against 120 mm nets was put very well in a recent programme on BBC Radio 4 which many hon. Members may have heard. Mr. Bernie Vaske, the outgoing

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chairman of the International Council for the Exploration of the Seas committee on fish management, which gives scientific advice to the European Commission, said that he could not support the argument for a 120 mm mesh. The arguments against it are well known to hon. Members who are taking part in the debate. Young cod and haddock are eaten by predators of the whiting family. If the whiting are not controlled by fishing, breeding stocks of cod and haddock will be affected. It is thus very important that the mesh size takes into account the complex habits of the multi-species environment which exists in the North sea.

The hon. Member for Grimsby referred to some of the trials which have taken place. I am sure that his figures were accurate, but various conclusions can be drawn from them. It is perfectly true that 846 small haddock below marketable size were caught when the existing nets were used. That is evidence of the problems with the gear which is in use at present. The trial also showed, however, that using the mesh size proposed by the Commission, only eight haddock of marketable size would be caught compared with 693 with the existing gear. That supports my hon. Friend's contention that we must not make changes which conserve some fish but end up taking away the fishermen's livelihood in the process. There must be a sensible compromise.

Another statistic which came out of the same trial was that, with the present gear, 900 whiting—the predators which feed on the young cod and haddock stocks of the future—were caught. With the Commission's proposed gear, no whiting at all were caught. All those predators would therefore continue to feed on the breeding stocks on which we depend for the future of our cod and haddock. There appears to be a good argument for the square mesh to which the hon. Member for Grimsby referred. According to the trials of which I have knowledge, there would be a considerable advantage in using a form of square mesh. It would lead to a big reduction in the number of discards. Discards at present amounting to about 50 per cent. would come down to between 10 and 15 per cent. Technical changes of that kind could lead to big improvements in conservation.

Our prawn stocks off the north-east coast of England have been threatened by the use of twin trawls. Our local fishermen believe that such intensive fishing would lead to the whole stock of prawns, so important to us in the north-east, being endangered. Fishermen in North Shields and elsewhere in the north-east have, to their credit, imposed a voluntary ban on such twin trawling. It has proved to be effective, but there is great concern that because of the pressure on stocks elsewhere fishermen from outside our area will in increasing numbers seek to fish in these waters. The voluntary banning of twin trawling could not then be enforced. Consideration ought to be given to imposing a statutory ban so as to protect these stocks which are so important to local fishermen.

North Shields depends on its smaller vessels. About 60 of them are based there. The well-being of local inshore fishermen is of particular concern to us. Far more families are supported by smaller boats for the same amount of fishing effort than by the large vessels that have been built in recent years. Far more sons follow their fathers into the fishing industry in the traditional family way in the case of the inshore fleet. Inshore fishermen feel particularly threatened by the pressures caused by diminishing stocks and by the movement of vessels into their traditional fishing grounds.

It is ridiculous that such a high proportion of small young fish should be caught unintentionally and tossed over the side as discards. Inevitably they die, with the result that they do not mature and breed. I understand that £15 million is spent each year on research. Far more information is needed about discards. They may be unintentional, but industrial fishing, which has been justifiably criticised in the debate, results in the deliberate catching of young fish. That is a scandal. The Community surely must face up to the problem and ban industrial fishing.

With regard to enforcement, more needs to be done to ensure that the gear regulations are complied with and that any black landings, or others of a suspicious nature that were referred to by a number of speakers, are exposed. The regulations must be properly enforced, but that does not now happen in some parts of the country.

A great deal more can be done to protect fish stocks by means of closed seasons and the closure of breeding areas. It would be relatively simple for the Community to agree to such proposals and I hope that these important measures will soon be agreed by the Community. The need for action is self-evident. The failure to take action in the past has led to the present dismal situation. My hon. Friend the Minister will go to Brussels knowing that the industry is united in its acceptance of the need for determined and urgent action now. We wish him well in the negotiations.

8.34 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Cromarty and Skye): I shall deal briefly with three points that have been made in the debate. A number of other points have been made more than once, so I shall not refer to them. The Minister is well known for his open-door policy. We are grateful to him. He demonstrated that he is very much on top of his job. I have some sympathy for him. A number of hon. Members with fishing constituencies in various parts of England have spoken in the debate. It seems that the geographical wisdom of Solomon will be needed to keep these warring tribes together.

The hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) lives in splendid isolation and is far away from those battles—as, I suspect, is my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Wallace). He tells me that any suggestion that fishermen in the northern isles lie is not true. That word can never be used about them. I am sure that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) will have much the same to say when he speaks.

My hon. Friends and I also oppose the proposed increase in minimum mesh size from 90 mm to 120 mm. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) speaks for Grimsby, as he made clear. However, some of us speak for a much wider area of the country known as Scotland. The hon. Gentleman must accept that what is good for Grimsby may not necessarily be good for the rest of Great Britain. I hope that the Minister will bear that in mind when he argues his case at European Community level.

The Minister referred to the fact that he had met representatives of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation in Aberdeen earlier today. Therefore, he will have listened

directly to the case made by Bob Allan, the chief executive, Willie Hay and others. The important point that they have stressed in their briefings and at their meetings with Scottish Members of Parliament who represent constituencies with fishing interests is that the scientific information available on the selectivity of a 120 mm diamond mesh net

"indicates clearly that there would be very large immediate losses in catch of marketable fish, which, in the case of haddock, would be likely to amount to not less than 50 per cent. in the average catch per haul. The decrease in the whiting catch with a 120 mm net would be very much greater, to the point of near elimination, and there is no guarantee that catches of either of these species would return in time to their previous levels, far less exceed them."

That is a cogently made case. I hope that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, who has necessarily to express the views of fishermen in his area, will nevertheless realise the genuine anxieties about the proposal of those who represent the Scottish fleet.

Every speaker in the debate has said, with varying degrees of strength and forcefulness, that the Minister should think again about decommissioning. The hon. Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw), who served on Public Accounts Committee at the time that the critical report was published, made a pertinent point when he reminded us—this point is all too often forgotten when the PAC report is cited—that the principle of decommissioning was not criticised. It was the practical application of decommissioning in these circumstances that was criticised. The Minister reiterated that he has not yet been persuaded—I put the emphasis optimistically on the word "yet" when I paraphrase him—but it was his predecessor who was in office when the PAC presented its report. One suspects that perhaps a sense of guilt is influencing the man at the top of the Ministry.

Mr. Salmond: Embarrassment.

Mr. Kennedy: Yes, that is an appropriate reminder.

Although the Minister has stressed that he is not yet persuaded, I was interested that he did not deploy the argument that rests on the criticisms of the Public Accounts Committee. The last time I contributed to a debate on this issue, the then Minister used that argument. In fact, it was the mainstay of his opposition to decommissioning. The Minister tonight did not dwell on that and I wonder whether it is because within the internal machinations of the Department there is just a flicker of recognition that there might be some merit in what is being argued.

The way things are going, those of us who hope to be back in this place after the next election will have to get used to the total absence of Scottish Conservative Members. I do not think that even the stirring words of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) will save the Tories in Paisley next week. In fact, one may ask whether the right hon. Member for Henley will get more votes in the leadership ballot next week than the Conservative candidates will get in the two by-elections next week.

I regret that the right hon. Member for Kincardine and Deeside (Mr. Buchanan-Smith) is not present. Had he been here, he would have argued strongly for decommissioning. He has taken every opportunity in the local media and at Scottish questions to recommend that course to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland. I am sure that he would have put the same argument to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had he been here tonight.

It may be an excessive fondness for crossword puzzles, but I thought that there was something cryptic about the phraseology of the Government's motion. It talks of

"the principle of strengthening the structural measures to reduce fleet size, provided that such measures can offer value for money."

That suggests a hint of a shuffle in the direction of the principle of decommissioning. I should be grateful if the Minister could give some indication about the extent to which the internal representations he has been receiving from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland has helped to influence opinion at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

Scottish Members try to read the smoke signals from the Scottish Office. However, the way things are going between the Minister of State and the Secretary of State, "smoke signals" is probably an understatement. The word "arson" may be more appropriate. There is a feeling that there is a fair degree of willingness in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland to go down this line but that it is being held back because of intransigence at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The Minister said that, when he spoke in Aberdeen today, his noble Friend Lord Strathclyde—nobody in the fishing industry in Scotland had heard of him at the time of his appointment—did not demur. I do not think that that necessarily represents all Conservative political opinion in Scotland, particularly not the constituents of serving, or soon to be former, Conservative Members. Therefore, will the Minister do everything possible to listen to his Scottish counterparts and try to overcome what appears to be the rather blind and blinkered obduracy of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in setting its face so firmly against decommissioning? It has to come, and the sooner the better.

Within aquaculture, emphasis is laid on the need for further research in terms of new markets. I want to express the anxiety felt by many of those whose constituencies have become increasingly dependent upon fish farming. That makes a tremendous contribution, not least in my area, to employment and income. There are legitimate anxieties about environmental aspects which are debated vigorously locally and nationally. Equally, there is anxiety over an issue for which the Minister is not responsible—the question of how accountable the Crown Estate Commissioners might be. I appreciate that they are appointed by the Treasury, so that is not an argument for the Minister.

There is no doubt that there has been great pressure on the domestic fish farming sector, not least because of the extent of Norwegian dumping that has taken place. The industry in the highlands and islands has developed through support from the Highlands and Islands development board. Initially, to get the industry up and running—I shall not go into the pros and cons of this vexed argument—many of the multinationals were given the prime sites and the biggest holdings.

Those such as, for example, a crofter in Lewis who diversifies as an adjunct to his croft and has one cage just off the shore have suffered. As the economics of the industry have turned sour in the past year, people such as that have suffered the most. To a certain extent, the multinationals can survive the lean periods on economics of scale. Given the influence that Norwegian dumping has

[Mr. Kennedy]

had on the European market and the prices generally, I wonder what progress the Government are making at European level on the question of a levy being applied. I am sure that the Minister will be aware of the anxiety that that causes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood)—my hon. Friends can be distinguished by the names of their constituencies, as we never have one name when at least three will do—mentioned the difficulties his fishermen are experiencing. He wanted me to ask the Minister to develop at some length the Government's attitude towards individual tradable quotas. Many of us feel strongly that is not the right route to go down. It is like taking a public asset and using it against public interest. I share that view, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland. It would be helpful if the Minister could clarify that.

Generally, problems abound. Although the stance that the Government are taking on some of the specifics of the draft directives has found support on both sides of the House, there is also dissatisfaction about action that the Government could be taking but, for whatever reason, have so far chosen not to. That is the case, not least, on decommissioning. That must remain vital to the restructuring of the industry which, sadly, is long overdue. I hope that the Minister can be more forthcoming. Clearly, votes in the country are swinging on this issue, particularly in fishing communities.

I suspect that decommissioning might yet emerge as an issue that will swing votes on the Back Benches of the Tory party. After all, Henley is noted for its regatta and there is no reason why the right hon. Member for Henley should not take decommissioning to its logical political conclusion next week and apply that principle to the Prime Minister. It is a restructuring which we would welcome.

8.49 pm

Mr. David Porter (Waveney): Following the self-styled spokesman for Scotland, I shall unashamedly speak for East Anglia, and for Waveney in particular.

As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House informed me last week, this is likely to be our only opportunity this year to discuss fishing, so I shall crave your famous indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on some of the related matters.

It is fitting and rather sad that we are debating this matter in the week of the 15th anniversary of the ending of the Icelandic cod war. As ever, we are debating fishing under a cloud of gloom and worry. It is true that we are not facing Iceland gunboat with gunboat—we solved that war in exchange for a NATO base—but a charge of Icelandic dumping on United Kingdom markets still stands, pending further inquiry.

It is often argued that the fishing industry is divided, that it is its own worst enemy and that it is small fry compared with even the pet food industry, but is there an industry more regulated, more vulnerable to external forces beyond its control or more psychologically important to a constituency such as mine, which includes Lowestoft, than fishing? I answer those three questions no, no, no.

Like other hon. Members, I sympathise with my hon. Friend the Minister, who faces an impossible task. As the hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) said, in England we are divided and there are differing views in the United Kingdom. We send our Ministers to Europe to do their best for our fishing waters. If ever there were a case for us to be resolute, fishing is it.

In fishing debates, hon. Members tend to make the same remarks, because in general we have the same problems, albeit with strong local differences and regional peculiarities. Although we repeat them every year, some questions remain unanswered. I hope that perhaps this year my hon. Friend the Minister will be able to answer one or two rather than leaving them hanging in the air to be answered next year.

An annual debate is inevitably a chance to air one or two grumbles. A minor grumble, but one which is important in my area, concerns the Sea Fish Industry Authority—an august body which possibly has ambitions to be even more important than it is. Its members are appointed for their expertise, but should there not be a built-in mechanism to ensure better regional representation? East Anglia is still not represented on it, but I refuse to believe that its individuals do not have the required expertise.

The explanatory memorandum comments on net selectivity to improve conservation and on banning blinders to make modest improvements in the spawning stocks. My hon. Friend the Minister says that this policy has been broadly accepted by the United Kingdom industry. Has it been broadly accepted our EC partners, especially by the Dutch, who in the past few years have built up an expertise in blinders?

We have already expressed doubts about the 120 mm mesh size, and no one who is connected with fishing is unable to recognise that the fishing effort should be reduced, but that is proposed at a time when, economically, the industry should be expanding. Plaice quotas affect my port, but all quotas must be caught in full or we shall be in danger of losing ground after 1993. As the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations has pointed out, will increasing mesh size or changing our licensing system achieve the required reductions? It doubts it, and many fishermen in my area doubt it.

I must deal with decommissioning. I must disappoint my hon. Friend the Minister by being in the same camp as other hon. Members. He has not answered this question, but I hope that he will: why should we contribute to other countries' decommissioning schemes through our EEC payments but not to our own? My hon. Friend said that decommissioning is no Holy Grail. Perhaps it is not, but it is a way of reaching that mythical Holy Grail.

The world's best scientific evidence is available. Undoubtedly the biggest worry facing us is fish stocks. I pay tribute to the contribution of the scientists at the MAFF laboratory in Lowestoft, who deservedly have an international reputation. If their work is to be treated seriously, should there not be a serious grasping of the nettle rather than a pruning of the twigs? That is an inappropriate analogy, but I hope that my hon. Friend takes the point. Decommissioning could be that serious grasping of the nettle.

All our fish markets will soon face the rigours of the new EC fish market hygiene regulations. Some will need modest adaptation and others will need major surgery that will fall not far short of total demolition. Grants can be applied for and extra taxpayers' money has been made available, but the fear is that markets in, for example,

Spain need such drastic rebuilding to bring them up to standard that they will absorb most of the money. That will leave areas such as Lowestoft, which was part-modernised to the best standards available only two or three years ago, in the cold. The cold wind of economic reality would be fair enough because Lowestoft is used to that, but that would place it at a disadvantage compared with its competitors.

One of the documents that we are debating says that the enlargement of the EC in 1986 has had particularly important consequences for the common fisheries policy, especially for its structural component, as a result of the size of the sector in Spain and Portugal. Will my hon. Friend spell out clearly the nature and scale of the distortion to the CFP and to fair competition that the probation of Spain and Portugal in the EEC means to the rest of us?

The fishing industry, when prospering, gives a hard-fought and decent living who those to risk life, limb and money to bring wholesome, cheap food to our tables. There are the deep sea men and owners, the inshore fisheries, the merchants, the port owners, the people who work directly and indirectly in the industry, the organisations, the factions, the groupings, the special interests and the individuals—and that is just at Lowestoft. It is vital to take account of as many of those different views as possible. They cannot all attend meetings in Lowestoft when a new issue must be debated, much less meetings in London or in Scotland. It is a big outlay in time and money beyond the means of many whose views on fishing MAFF needs to absorb.

Is it beyond the wit of modern technology, and would it not be cheaper in the long run for all concerned, to install a system of electronic instant two-way communication in the office or home of every interested party or person so that he or she can feel a part of the informed decisions that are taken on behalf of the United Kingdom industry?

Restructuring the regulations should help, but in his visits to the many ports of the United Kingdom, for which I thank him, did not my hon. Friend the Minister learn that fishermen feel that they are so subject to external dangers that other industries do not face that they face a catalogue of problems which I will not risk your anger, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by mentioning? If I were to talk about fuel prices that are higher than many can stand, you would rule me out of order. If I were to mention the closeness of industry and Government in other EC countries, which leads to doubt about even-handedness in the enforcement of regulations, you would again rule me out of order. There is an uneasy feeling of resentment about how farmers fare compared with fishermen.

Does my hon. Friend understand that sometimes fishermen of many years' experience say, "Hang it, why not dump all regulations except free fishing for a month, then close the sea and give us a tax break to do something else for the rest of the year?" That feeling is not conducive to a healthy industry.

Will my hon. Friend spell out now, and unequivocally, that the Government want an independent United Kingdom fishing industry, supported and encouraged fairly, regionally and strategically balanced and on a sound economic basis—yes, fair enough—but with both hands free to meet its challenges?

8.58 pm

Mr. Calum Macdonald (Western Isles): Before I make my main point, let me pick up three of the points made by other hon. Members.

I was delighted to hear the Minister speak so strongly about the Commission's proposal for 120 mm nets, and I applaud his determination to resist it. The fishing industry's resistance has come not from any spirit of evasion or irresponsibility, but from a recognition of the practical problems that will result.

The Minister mentioned the nephrops fisheries, but not the trials of separator trawls that have been undertaken to solve the problem of the by-catch. I hear that the trials have gone very well. I hope that, if they prove as good as seems likely, the Government will encourage small fishermen to adopt separator trawls, which will bring conservation benefits.

There has been support from both sides of the House for a renewal of the decommissioning scheme. The Minister said that there were practical problems; however, he was probably thinking mostly of financial problems, and the need to ensure that the money was spent in the best possible way and went to the right people. There are other practical problems. If the Government intend to move towards a decommissioning scheme, they should take care that any such scheme tackles the core of the problem—that of the larger trawlers, which are causing the overfishing. We do not want a scheme that ends up sucking the smaller boats out of the industry and leaving the larger ones in place. In the long run, that would not solve the problem of overfishing.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said that the Government should seriously consider a system of "coastal zoning" as a means of managing both fisheries and other activities that are now impinging on the coast, such as aquaculture, dredging and mineral and oil extraction. All these things —which conflict with fishing—could be better managed and regulated if a coastal zone system was adopted.

I commend to the Minister and his officials the recent report of the Marine Conservation Society, which proposes a United Kingdom coastal zone management plan and has been endorsed by the World Wide Fund for Nature. We need to explore such possibilities in the future.

Let me now refer more specifically to my own area—although I hope that what I say will be relevant not only to the north-west and the Hebridean fisheries, but to some of the other fisheries in the United Kingdom for instance, in Northern Ireland and the north-east of England—that were mentioned earlier. A proposal submitted to the Government earlier this year suggested that a simple, cheap, effective and easy-to-regulate first step to ensure proper conservation and management in the inshore waters of the north-west of Scotland was the introduction of a weekend ban on fisheries—a total ban from midnight on Friday until midday, or early morning, on Monday. It would ban fisheries of any kind in the inshore waters off the Minches and the west coast of the Hebrides. It would be simple to introduce and police, and is supported by the fishermen of the west coast. However, so far the Government have refused to take note of the proposal, let alone introduce it. That is sad: if the Government are seriously interested in conservation, they should consider it seriously.

[Mr. Calum Macdonald]

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) talked about the conflicts between the various geographical elements of the British fishing industry. His fishermen in Northern Ireland now face much the same difficulties as mine in the Hebrides—and, I believe, all fishermen on the west coast of Scotland. A state of anarchy is emerging on the west coast, because there is no incentive for the traditional fishing industries to fish in a responsible and sustainable way while there are incursions from the east coast of Scotland. Boats have hit their quota ceilings and are moving to the west coast. As long as that continues, there will be no incentive for fishermen on the west coast to fish in a responsible and sustainable way, as they are capable of doing because of their smaller boats.

A specific example of this process is the newly developed style of long-lining for dogfish and skate in the Hebridean Minches. This example shows that being traditional does not mean that the fishermen do not go into new types of fisheries or use new techniques—they do. Long-lining is an exciting development. There is good demand for those fish, both domestically and on the continent. The fishery can be sustained during the summer and winter months. It can exploit grounds that cannot be exploited by normal means. The fishery has been developed experimentally over the past 24 months by boats from my constituency, from the Hebrides. Because of its great success, it has been taken up by 16 boats in the Western Isles. They have rigged themselves out for long-lining for dogfish and skate.

Now that this fishery has been developed in a bold way by these fishermen, and the Western Isles boats are poised to take advantage of it, what has happened? This year already, four boats which used to fish for white fish, cod and haddock along the east coast have come into these waters. Perhaps I shall make the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) happier by pointing out that those four boats are not from the east coast of Scotland but come from Grimsby. The key issue is not the point of origin but the size of the boats.

These boats have run up against quota problems fishing for white fish in the North sea. They have seen the dogfish and skate long-lining fishery open up on the west coast and have begun to transfer their attentions to it. Their boat size means that, when they transfer their attentions to that area, the whole fishery, which has been carefully and experimentally built up, will come under increasing threat. Each Western Isles boat has between 4,000 and 5,000 hooks. Each east coast boat has 20,000 hooks, which is a four to fivefold increase in fishing power. Next year, we can expect 10 to 20 such boats to come from the east coast.

That fishery will be exploited and plundered completely. Any incentive for the traditional fishermen to develop, sustain and manage a new fishery in a way dictated to by their own interests—because they want the fishery to last a long time—is removed by the way in which other fishing fleets can all too easily transfer their attentions from one region to another under the present regime.

The only thing to save the west coast after this past catastrophic year has been the abysmal failure of the Government's 92-day rule. It is widely accepted that that rule has been flouted everywhere. If it were not flouted, there would be many more boats coming to the west coast from the east coast.

Mr. Kennedy: The hon. Member and I share many representative organisations, just as we share the Minch, the passage of sea between our respective constituencies. It is useful to put on record the seriousness of the difficulty on the west coast, around the Western Isles and the northern isles, this year. Like other hon. Members, the hon. Member and I went to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland to see the then Minister of State, Lord Sanderson. The difficulty led to the formation of a unique umbrella organisation, drawing on all the representative fishing groups, from the Orkneys down to the Firth of Clyde and all points in between. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that the fishermen's efforts to try to resolve some of the issues show, if nothing else, the seriousness of the crisis that the industry faces?

Mr. Macdonald: When the industry on the west coast gets together, thrashes out some of its differences and comes forward with proposals such as the weekend ban, it is disappointing that the Government, who were handed on a plate a conservation measure that was cheaply and easily enforced, looked the other way. However, I took encouragement from the Minister's recent meeting with the Scottish Fishermen's Federation. I hope that he will also be willing to meet representatives of the West Coast Action Group if a meeting can be set up in the near future.

I want to point out an oddity of the fishing industry, which is not an oddity of any other industry. In almost every other industry, increased efficiency means an increase in the supply of the product, whether it is cars or, in agriculture, sheep or grain. One increases the supply and reduces the cost to the consumer through increased efficiency. The fishing industry, uniquely, is not like that. Efficiency of catching power, if anything, works in reverse. The more efficient the industry is, the more the supply will begin to diminish in the long term as one begins to fish out the stocks. As a result, the price to the consumer shoots up.

I warn the Government against what may lie behind some of the present approaches to the industry, such as licence aggregation and quota aggregation. I have the feeling that the Government hope to achieve an industry with many fewer, but far larger and more efficient, boats. That is not the solution to the problem. Going for efficiency in the fishing industry is not like going for efficiency in agriculture or in any other industry. Efficiency in the fishing industry does not have the beneficial consequences that it has in every other industry. On the contrary, being over-efficient has led us to our present pass.

The supply of fish to be caught is set by nature. No matter how efficient a fishing boat is, it cannot create fish. The real question is whether the finite supply of fish is to be caught by many fewer boats, which are more efficient, but more highly leveraged and which need to earn huge profits to keep themselves and their bankers going, or whether that finite supply should be spread out among many small, less-leveraged boats, which would earn less profit per boat, but would need less profit per boat because there would be fewer loans to pay off. They could earn sufficient to keep not only the fishermen and their families, but whole communities alive, especially on the west coast of Scotland.

It makes no sense to have a system of regulation—or non-regulation—of fisheries that would lead to the destruction of the small fishing communities of the west coast—and especially of the north-west coast—of

Scotland, that would benefit only a small number of eventually profiteering boat owners and their bankers and would not benefit the consumers. Such a system would also place a burden on the taxpayer, because the public purse would eventually have to be used to resurrect the destroyed fishing communities.

9.13 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I hope that the rather tame motion does not imply any complacency about the crisis that is enveloping the fishing industry. The noble Lord Strathclyde, whose name the Minister was able to remember so well, said of the fishing industry in a newspaper article in *Scotland on Sunday* on 4 November:

"I wouldn't have said it's in one of its most critical periods."

I hope that, given what the Minister has heard tonight from both sides of the House, and given the prospects not only of immediate negotiations in the European Community but of even lower quotas and total allowable catches for next year, he will in no way share the complacent "Crisis—what crisis?" view of the Scottish Minister responsible for fisheries. I know that the Scottish Minister has been in the job for only a few weeks, but his early findings and soundings in the industry should have removed from him any sense that the industry is making do or that anything less than major changes of policy will be enough to meet the crisis that is enveloping the industry.

The sense of complacency probably stems from the fact that, although the quantity of landings this year has substantially decreased, prices have increased. The Government may therefore feel that things are not as bad as all that. I do not think that the Scottish Minister would take that view if he were a fish processing worker in my constituency earning about £100 a week and with no wage increase at all last year because the problems have been passed on to the processing sector through high prices.

We should not underrate the problem of increased costs in the fishing fleet. Penal interest rates have cost the Scottish fishing industry alone perhaps £10 million. Imagine the sense of fury that fishermen must have felt as they sailed past oil platforms in the past few weeks, given that they face a doubling of their fuel costs. In some cases, half the revenue from a fishing trip now goes in increased fuel costs, yet the fishermen have to steam past platforms run by companies that are exploiting the wealth of the North sea, where development costs have not increased during the past few months. The industry is facing increased costs to which it is exceptionally vulnerable. I hope that the Minister will confirm that the somewhat complacent views of his counterpart at the Scottish Office in no way reflect the overall policy of the Government.

I want to speak both about technical conservation and about the structural support measures proposed for the industry. I have a reasonably substantial record of advocating technical conservation. In the Scottish Grand Committee last July, I made a long speech—perhaps too long—in which I dwelt for some time on the technical conservation measures that would be necessary and explained why I thought that they represented a far better bet for the future stability of the industry than a total reliance on ever-lower quota allocations. But the technical measures must be the correct measures.

I have four specific questions for the Minister and I hope that I shall get favourable answers to all of them. First, does he accept—from his opening speech, it would appear that he does—that the 120 mm mesh would virtually wipe out the prospect of a mixed fishery in the North sea? Does he accept the view of the Scottish Fishermen's Federation that there would be a 50 per cent. decline in the haddock catch and that the whiting catch would all but disappear?

Secondly, does the hon. Gentleman accept that the shape and design of fishing gear are at least as important as mesh size—if not more so? On that, I should correct the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), who seems to be suffering from the delusion that the Scottish Fishermen's Federation is arguing for the status quo. The Minister will be well aware that that is not correct. For the past two years, the federation has argued consistently for a series of technical changes to fishing gear, which should have the effect of increasing the number of small fish that escape into the sea not just alive but in good condition.

There is now substantial scientific evidence to support the technical changes that the federation has been advocating for some time. I refer to the proposals for square mesh panels, not ballooning at the codend, and the one-net rule. I would be grateful if the Minister could confirm that the Scottish Fisherman's Federation has been arguing for those things for some time and that the scientific evidence shows that, at least for whiting and haddock, innovations like the square mesh panel above the codend will have a substantial effect in increasing the escape of immature fish.

Thirdly, I want confirmation that the Minister accepts that an official 90 mm directed fishery for whiting would substantially increase discards of cod and haddock.

Finally, the hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) said that there was at least a suspicion that the basis of that argument is coming from interests that favour the expansion of the industrial fishery in the North sea.

The Minister has heard from both sides of the House today that the general feeling is that the industrial fishery should be an immediate target, if not for closure, then for severe restriction. When fish for human consumption are so scarce, it is untenable to continue to extract 1 million tonnes of pout and sand eels—the feed stock and the food source—from the North sea annually, when the haddock fishery for human consumption is down to less than 40,000 tonnes. It is obscene to have the industrial fishery running at current levels. I repeat the earlier call for the Minister to show determination and ensure that that aspect will be put firmly on the agenda of the Council meeting and that there will be a specific debate on how the industrial fishery can be controlled.

I want now to consider structural support. I hope that hon. Members from various parties will support the call by Winnie Ewing, the MEP for the Highlands and Islands, when she moves in the European Parliament next week to have the north-east of Scotland added to the list of areas entitled to special structural support from the European Community. No area in the country is more dependent on fishing than the north-east of Scotland.

I compiled some figures today to give the Minister an idea of the disadvantage from which the fishing industry in Scotland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom is suffering as a result of the Government's intransigence in terms of the take-up of decommissioning and lay-up schemes. The figures come from the joint seminar on fisheries held by the Commission and the European Parliament in France last week. Knowing the Conservative party's current interest

[Mr. Alex Salmond]

in the hard ecu, I will express the figures in ecu. Over the past three years, the figures for lay-up subsidies to other European fleets are as follows: 50 million ecu in 1987; 30 million ecu in 1988; and 6 million ecu in 1989. The vast bulk of the funds for lay-up premiums have gone to the Spanish fishing industry.

The figures for decommissioning are as follows: 37 million ecu in 1987; 49 million ecu in 1988; and 45 million ecu in 1989. The vast bulk of those funds went to the Danish fishing industry. In sterling, the total over those three years is £115 million. The Scottish and United Kingdom share of those fisheries funds is zero as a result of the Government's hard-line determination not even to spend other people's money on fisheries, because the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made such a cod of attempting to introduce a decommissioning scheme eight years ago.

When decommissioning schemes are being pursued successfully elsewhere in Europe, it is not sustainable to pursue the argument that such schemes could not be carried out efficiently, productively and cost-effectively in the Community. The United Kingdom's share of the total sum for all structural support for fisheries, including modernisation and new build, over the past four years was 7 per cent. in 1987; 3 per cent. in 1988; 3·6 per cent. in 1989; and only 1 per cent. so far this year. How on earth can the fishing industry, in the tough competitive environment of the European Community, hope to compete with fleets as powerful as the Spanish and Danish fleets if vast sums of money are going to support the structural improvement of fishing in those countries and no funds are supporting the same structural improvements for the fishing industry in this country?

Earlier in the debate, the Minister was speculating on what Luxembourg's policy on fishing might be. We shall have to leave that as an open question, but there should be no doubt that there is a Luxembourg veto over fishery matters. The Prime Minister is in no doubt on these matters, although I do not know the views of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). No doubt we shall hear them expounded over the next few days. Perhaps even as I speak the right hon. Member is, in Paisley, speculating on the use of the Luxembourg veto.

The Minister has made it clear that he is opposed to the 120 mm mesh size, and that his agenda on technical conservation changes is different from that being put forward by Mr. Marin. Does he believe that the Luxembourg national interest veto is available on fisheries matters? If the bit comes to the bit, is the Department prepared to use such a veto to defend what is seen in Scotland, however it is seen elsewhere, as of vital national interest?

9.26 pm

Mr. Curry: With the leave of the House. For the most part, the debate has been conducted with a great deal of understanding and many points have been sensitively put. I hope that I can sum up in the same spirit. As the hon. Members for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) and for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) said, I try to keep my door open. That policy will continue. Whenever someone has a sensible argument to put to me, I shall listen to it. I have done that in the past and I shall continue to do so. I was generous in giving way to interventions when I opened the debate, but I shall try to be quicker in winding up. I hope that the House understands that.

The hon. Member for Glanford and Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) supported the general thrust of what we are saying about technical conservation. I am grateful to him and to all those hon. Members who repeated those points. My introductory remarks were clear about that and included the famous four points mentioned by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). There is no equivocation. Our position on these matters is clear.

Every hon. Member who has spoken has mentioned decommissioning. I should make it clear beyond all doubt that, as I have said before, the problem with decommissioning is not that we could not devise a scheme for it if we wished to go down that road. The criticisms levelled against the previous scheme were, as hon. Members have said, about the mechanics of it. The problem is that we still remain to be convinced that that would be a proper and good use of money.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough (Sir M. Shaw) spoke about a targeted scheme. It is true that we could have met many of the points made by the Public Accounts Committee, but if we want to target inefficient vessels and catch few fish, how do we get value for money? If we target efficient vessels which catch lots of fish, would we be aiming for a less efficient fleet? That dilemma must be faced and sorted out. There is no easy answer to decommissioning. We have put forward various proposals. There has been movement in capacity aggregations and we are still looking at other proposals. As I have said, when people make sensible arguments, I will listen to them.

Like several other hon. Members, my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Mr. Harris) mentioned allegations of Scottish fishing activities in other waters. I said then that we have proposals on producer organisation management which we hope will address that problem. We are inviting comments on whether the track records for next year should omit those catches which appear to be abnormal, for whatever reason. We have had mixed reactions from the fishing industry, but we are exploring that possibility.

We have managed to do something about cod in the Irish sea. As for prosecutions, there is the general problem of rules of evidence. I am talking about Scotland. With the best will in the world, difficulties have to be overcome. When I was in Aberdeen this morning, Scottish fishermen said that they felt that they were the subject of intense scrutiny and a surveillance operation. They felt that they were not getting away with murder or even with slight scratches.

Mr. Morley: The Minister has referred directly to the problem of enforcement. Does he agree that there is no point in having good conservation measures if there is not adequate enforcement? We are all aware of the pressures which are driving fishermen, but there must be proper enforement.

I accept much of what the Minister has said about decommissioning, but will he agree that we are still not progressing in reducing our fleet? That is the key factor. The problem can be resolved only by a decommissioning scheme.

Mr. Curry: I take issue with the hon. Gentleman on whether only a decommissioning scheme can do that.

There are other measures. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about surveillance but add the rider that it is the nature of the industry that, if individuals want to cheat, it is not in the power of man to stop them, short of having an inspector on every boat 24 hours a day and inspectors at every port. We do not want that sort of regulation. That is why I want the techical measures that we are discussing to be acceptable to the industry so that those who work within it feel that the measures are in their interests and that we are not working against them

Mr. Keith Mans (Wyre): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Curry: I shall, but I will not make a habit of doing so.

Mr. Mans: I am pleased by what my hon. Friend has said about not using the track record of the last year. He will know that Fleetwood has suffered heavily in area VIIa as a result off the exploits of Scottish fishermen. Is it not possible to increase surveillance and move a little further towards the possibility of having more inspectors on boats, especially in areas where there has been misreporting in the past?

Mr. Curry: We shall do our best to ensure that there is an efficient enforcement effort. We shall explore the possibility of bringing certain technology to bear to help us with the tracking of boats. We shall do all we can.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: This is the last time I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Salmond: When the Minister is considering track records, will he consider also the substantial payments of the Scottish industry? Will he accept that the track records extend too far back historically and do not permit a reasonable interpretation of current fishing perfomance and current catching power?

Mr. Curry: All matters that are urged upon us by the industry are bound to be taken into consideration when we are examining track records; otherwise, we would not have a consultation process in the first place.

Mr. Salmond: What does that mean?

Mr. Curry: Whatever the hon. Gentleman makes of it.

The right hon. Member for Strangford (Mr. Taylor) asked me about Gibraltar. He will know that Gibraltar is not in the Community, nor is it within the United Kingdom. Therefore, it does not apply. As we understand it, commercial fishery from Gibraltar is extremely small. The two Spanish territories to which the right hon. Gentleman referred have special status under the Spanish accession treaty and therefore fall——

Mr. John D. Taylor: Gibraltar is within the European Community. It was in it long before Spain.

Mr. Curry: Not in the terms in which we have been conducting the debate.

The right hon. Member for Strangford said that we yielded to the Isle of Man. I take issue with him on that score. We yielded nothing to the Isle of Man. We have clear safeguards about the rights of our fishermen in Isle of Man waters. We discuss them on many occasions.

Perhaps I might point out to the right hon. Member for Strangford that there is not an English Fisheries Minister. I am the Minister responsible for United Kingdom fisheries. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is in overall charge of United Kingdom fisheries policy. I do not see it as my responsibility to protect the English fleet. I see it as my job to be responsible for the needs of the United Kingdom fleet. There is always a Northern Ireland member of the United Kingdom delegation. That applies to agriculture as well as fisheries. The support of the Northern Ireland representative is always extremely valuable to us.

I was grateful for the constructive remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough. I recently had the pleasure of opening a new fish dock with him in Scarborough. I am only happy that it did not happen when all the lights went off.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) asked me about the Hague preference. I understand that people in Grimsby and ports south of it feel anxiety about it, but how does one define northern Britain? At some stage one must define it. The quantities of fish are small. If we dilute the arrangements right through the coast, we shall end up not giving a quantity that is worth while.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Curry: No. I have not completed my remarks. When I intervened in the hon. Member's speech I told him that I had made it clear that, should the Hague preference extend to species other than haddock and to greater quantities of haddock than in the past, we should have to reconsider the mechanism for redistribution. I reaffirm that.

As other hon. Members have said, compared with other ports Grimsby is a distant-water cod fishery and cod can take a 120 mm net. It is a different fishery, and that accounts for the difference. I intervened to mention the quota-hopping case. I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Gentleman will be satisfied with that.

I note the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Trotter) made. He mentioned the twin-trawl ban on the prawn stocks. Again, we are faced with the dilemma of whether we want to take a measure which would effectively ban any method of fishing. It is not simple. We constantly keep the matter under review. I am aware that, in other areas, it has been decided to go for a ban on twin trawls. However, at the heart of fisheries policy, we must decide whether our objective is to make the fishing industry less efficient by making people fish less efficiently, so that more people can participate and remain, in the industry, or to move towards a more efficient industry, however that is defined and whatever limits we place on that evolution. Clearly, limits might have to be placed on that evolution.

Mr. Trotter: Is not the local fishing community the best judge of how to preserve its livelihood for the future by preserving stocks?

Mr. Curry: A balance must be struck between the judgment of the local fishing community and the implications for other fishing communities and overall fisheries management. Nothing can be decided purely on a local basis. Of course, we pay particular attention to the needs of communities, especially where the industry is highly localised.

The hon. Member for Ross, Cromarty and Skye (Mr. Kennedy) had a great deal of fun. There is no difference of

[Mr. Curry]

policy between DAFS and MAFF. We co-operate closely and our officials co-operate closely. When we send delegations to Brussels, we are represented at an official level by teams from both Departments. The officials interchange their work and contribute to each other's work. The hon. Gentleman may suggest otherwise as much as he wants, but we are indivisible in our policy and we intend to keep it that way.

On Norwegian dumping, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman if he will allow me. That is not because I do not wish to reply now, but because the procedures are complicated. It is somewhat like the Schleswig-Holstein question, and I have forgotten some of the details. Therefore, I should like to give the hon. Gentleman a full account of what must be followed and the stage that we have reached in the proposals.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Porter), whose constituency includes the principal port of Lowestoft, which I shall visit on Monday, asked about the role of Spain and Portugal. Our commitment to the notion of relative stability remains. We have not compromised that commitment. He also mentioned representation on the Sea Fish Industry Authority. The problem is that, by statute, it consists of 12 people. Also by statute, four must be independent. That leaves eight people to represent catchers, merchants, processors and the whole of the diverse industry. With the best will in the world, we cannot represent every geographical interest. I note what my hon. Friend said about East Anglia. If we find an occasion on which I can give satisfaction, of course, I shall seek to do so.

The hon. Member for Western Isles (Mr. Macdonald) made a thoughtful and sensible speech. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Yes, the hon. Gentleman makes thoughtful and sensible speeches. I hope that my saying that will not do him too much damage in his constituency. I note what he said about coastal zoning. If he wishes to discuss it with me I shall be happy to do so. He said that his west coast small fishermen would like to talk to me. Clearly, the prime responsibility lies with my noble Friend Lord Strathclyde. However, if those fishermen think that it would be useful to see me also, I shall of course make myself available for such a meeting.

I have always understood the hon. Gentleman's concern about small communities, which he has expressed in all these debates in which he has participated. It is not my intention that we end up with only three large boats coming from a single port. The thrust of the provisions is not that; it is to enable the fishing communities to make a living.

I shall not respond to the attacks made upon my noble Friend by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). Those comments were the only point at which a note of sourness was introduced into the debate. Those comments were unnecessary—all the more so because they are wholly untrue. However, the hon. Gentleman asked me four specific questions, to which the answers are yes, yes, yes and, "It depends what you mean."

Mrs. Margaret Ewing (Moray): What does that mean?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Lady has only just appeared in the Chamber. I gave a detailed response in my introductory remarks, before the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan had asked the question.

Mr. Andrew Welsh (Angus, East) *rose*——

Mr. Curry: No, the hon. Gentleman has been peripatetic in the Chamber and I shall not give way to him. If Opposition Members read my introductory remarks in *Hansard*, they will find that they are perfectly clear——

Mr. Welsh: I appreciate the Minister giving way. My hon. Friend the Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) asked a straightforward question: does the Minister have the power of veto at that meeting? If the Scottish fishing industry is threatened, as is obviously the case, will he be prepared to use that veto?

Mr. Curry: The hon. Gentleman asked me four questions. He asked me about the 120 mm net, and I said that that was not on. He asked me about the shape and design of the nets, and I said that I agreed with him. He asked me about the role of whiting, and I said that I agreed with him. He asked me about the industrial fisheries, and I said that I did not necessarily associate myself with the motive behind the proposals, but that I agreed with the burden of his remarks and that we are not in the business of encouraging industrial fisheries.

The fisheries sector has never found it necessary to employ a veto. We settle these things in the Council by means of majority voting and we work towards building those majorities. Invoking the Luxembourg compromise should be reserved for issues of grave national importance. If any such matter arose, we should have to consider whether we thought that it was a matter of national importance of an order that would justify the use of a veto. I suspect that such a decision would be taken at a level other than that of the Ministers representing the United Kingdom in that Council. We go to the Councils equipped to negotiate. We do not intend to turn the Council into a telephone exchange, because that is not a very good way of going forward.

I have attempted to summarise the debate. There has been a wide consensus. The way forward for our fisheries is to introduce sensible and practical measures for conservation, which will command the consent of our fishermen so that we can start the ball rolling and move towards measures which produce an ever-increasing conservation yield, if I may use that expression. These proposals form a starting point. They go to extremes, but we can build down from them to achieve a sensible beginning.

Our fishing debates tend to invoke a large measure of consensus about our concern for the industry—a concern that is reflected in this Minister. Several hon. Members have been kind enough to acknowledge that I have the industry's concerns at heart. I am anxious that that is seen to be the case, and I invite the House to support the proposals.

Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 69, Noes 10.

Division No. 4] **[9.43 pm**

AYES

Amess, David	Atkinson, David
Arbuthnot, James	Bennett, Nicholas *(Pembroke)*
Arnold, Sir Thomas	Boswell, Tim

Bowis, John
Brazier, Julian
Burt, Alistair
Cash, William
Clarke, Rt Hon K. *(Rushcliffe)*
Conway, Derek
Coombs, Simon *(Swindon)*
Curry, David
Davis, David *(Boothferry)*
Dykes, Hugh
Emery, Sir Peter
Fookes, Dame Janet
Forsyth, Michael *(Stirling)*
Fox, Sir Marcus
Gale, Roger
Gill, Christopher
Goodlad, Alastair
Griffiths, Peter *(Portsmouth N)*
Hague, William
Hamilton, Hon Archie *(Epsom)*
Hamilton, Neil *(Tatton)*
Hargreaves, Ken *(Hyndburn)*
Harris, David
Holt, Richard
Howarth, G. *(Cannock & B'wd)*
Howe, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Hughes, Robert G. *(Harrow W)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Michael
Janman, Tim
King, Roger *(B'ham N'thfield)*
Kirkhope, Timothy
Knapman, Roger
Knight, Greg *(Derby North)*
Knowles, Michael
Lawrence, Ivan
Lennox-Boyd, Hon Mark
Macfarlane, Sir Neil
Mans, Keith
Miller, Sir Hal
Morrison, Rt Hon P *(Chester)*
Mudd, David
Neale, Gerrard
Neubert, Michael
Onslow, Rt Hon Cranley
Paice, James
Patnick, Irvine
Porter, David *(Waveney)*
Raffan, Keith
Renton, Rt Hon Tim
Shaw, Sir Michael *(Scarb')*
Stewart, Andy *(Sherwood)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Thompson, D. *(Calder Valley)*
Trotter, Neville
Waller, Gary
Wheeler, Sir John
Widdecombe, Ann
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann
Winterton, Nicholas
Young, Sir George *(Acton)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nicholas Baker and
Mr. Timothy Wood.

NOES

Carlile, Alex *(Mont'g)*
Ewing, Mrs Margaret *(Moray)*
Kennedy, Charles
Maclennan, Robert
Molyneaux, Rt Hon James
Salmond, Alex
Skinner, Dennis
Spearing, Nigel
Taylor, Rt Hon J. D. *(S'ford)*
Wallace, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Archy Kirkwood and
Mr. Andrew Welsh.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Community Documents Nos. 8317/90 on technical measures for the conservation of fishing resources and 8240/90 on measures to improve and adapt structures in the fisheries and aquaculture sector; and supports the Government's view that changes in existing technical conservation measures are needed to improve the conservation of fish stocks and that these should achieve a balance between conservation and maintaining a viable fishing industry, the Government's recognition of the need to match Community fishing capacity with available fisheries resources, and the principle of strengthening the structural measures to reduce fleet size, provided that such measures can offer value for money.

Romania (Mentally Handicapped Children)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

9.54 pm

Miss Emma Nicholson (Torridge and Devon, West): I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for granting me this Adjournment debate which I am glad and honoured to share with the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) because this is an all-party debate and it is proper that he should share it with me.

I draw the attention of the House to the tragic plight of mentally handicapped children in Romania. In so doing, I believe that I shall paint a harrowing picture. The picture that I intend to paint is not the whole of the picture in Romania, but it is a symbol. It is perhaps the starkest and most extreme case of the immorality of communist policies and the evils that they created, even in the treatment of innocent children.

Before I became a Member of Parliament, I worked for the Save the Children Fund. The efforts of the Austrian Save the Children Fund led to the creation of a children's home in Romania called, most barely, home No. 6. I visited Romania as a member of an all-party delegation. We examined the plight of religious minorities, in particular the plight of the Jewish minority. While I was there I visited some of the hospitals and homes in which children were living. Pictures of the conditions in which they were living had been shown to devastating effect on Western television. I visited Romania, and other eastern European countries, last August, during the recess.

The conditions in home number six were so appalling that I feel that it is right and proper to draw the attention of the House to them. I understand that under the previous regime it was wrong to be mentally handicapped and that it was wrong also to have children who were mentally handicapped. It is not so long since this country regarded mental handicap almost as a disease. It is not surprising, therefore, that mental handicap was frowned on in a dictatorship where only the fit could flourish and where so much bribery and corruption was built into the system. It is for that reason that those children can truly be called forgotten children.

I do not speak now of the AIDS babies, of whose plight we know so well from the pictures on our television screens, or of the large orphanages that have recently featured in the press. These institutions are for delightful children, aged between seven and 14. Those children are there because they are mentally handicapped. Nevertheless, their handicap is only mild; it is of the order of an IQ of about 75, or a little lower. There is a boy in my constituency with an IQ of 70 who, in the wake of the Warnock report, is in mainstream education. Conditions in Romania bear no similarity whatsoever to the happy village school in Winkleigh where that boy is being educated. Conditions are far closer to those in Dartmoor prison, except that Dartmoor prison would be preferable.

I saw children whose heads had been shaved because of lice. There were open sores on their arms. There were six or seven staff for about 400 boys. The staff were worn out and they were pessimistic about what they could do for the children. The dormitories were filled with stench on account of filthy, squalid mattresses. There was no running

[Miss Emma Nicholson]

water. For about 40 boys there were a couple of taps. There were no main sewers and there was little electricity. The ceilings were black with swarms of mosquitoes. Most of the windows, covered with mesh, were broken because the boys played outside on the only playing field that they had, which was covered with concrete.

It was an extraordinarily miserable sight. In all my years with the Save the Children Fund I cannot recall seeing anything in the west to compare with it. I have seen plenty of comparable sites in the poorest parts of the world such as Africa, India or even South America. The shock of finding such sites in the wider world of Europe is what determined myself and other members of our delegation, particularly the hon. Member for Dumbarton, to do something.

Of course, we wondered what to do. Our next visit happened to be to the President. We asked his advice and I asked him whether he would be patron if we were to run an appeal. He readily agreed. We went on to see the Prime Minister and put the same point to him. He showed us the new committee that he had already set up. It was excellent. He also showed us the potential child care legislation which, in our eyes, was not so good. However, he has a soft spot for children and he said that he would be our vice-patron.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kirkhope.]*

Miss Nicholson: We went on to seek the guidance and support of leading members of the religious organisations in Romania. We asked the patriarch, the cardinal archbishop, the leader of the free churches, the chief rabbi, business men and other good people. We have formed an embryo committee in Romania which is willing to help in any way it can. We still have the help of the Austrian Save the Children Fund and, since we returned, we have been offered help by many of the small British organisations that have links with the Romanian community and are anxious to do all that they can. In addition, we must not forget the strong, although small, Romanian community in the United Kingdom. The Romanian community in Reading has been broadcasting in Romanian to Romania on the BBC world service for the past 20 years. That may well have been instrumental in the crucial revolution.

The purpose of our work is to effect change, to introduce good child care laws and practice and to start the ball rolling on training. There has been no training of special experts such as teachers since 1978. I understand that the last psychiatrist in Romania was trained in 1972. Under the old regime everybody was supposed to be entirely mentally healthy. We will pursue longer-term plans with organisations such as CARITAS—the Catholic agency for international relief. It is an agency of great size and integrity. It has a plan to break up the institutions. As I have said, there are 200 of them and the largest houses 700 boys.

I shall now deal with what I hope will be a short-term effort because I hope that the CARITAS plan, the Prime Minister's plan or others like it will take effect quickly. I want to define it as short-term aid from Westminster. We are forming an all-party group for mentally handicapped children in Romania. That group will run the first ever all-party appeal—the parliamentary all-party appeal for Romanian children. We plan to launch our appeal on 3 December.

I offer my thanks to you, Mr. Speaker, for generously lending us your patronage and to the Lord Chancellor who has followed your lead. We have a long list of eminent Back-Bench names from both sides of the House who are flocking to join us. I believe that our eminent supporters in the outer world will include Bishop Carey and the other religious leaders. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton has written to the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster, and I am sure that the other religious leaders will come forward, too.

This is the simplest of appeals—a Christmas appeal. Our aim is to obtain money for presents for the children which will be delivered on our behalf by the Austrian Save the Children Fund, which visits them regularly. Longer term in Romania, the charitable efforts could be devoted to creating local leagues of friends or perhaps sending United Kingdom volunteer experts overseas. I pay warm tribute to the many people in the United Kingdom who have already given generously of their money, time and skills.

Our parliamentary group will concentrate on building up good relationships with our colleagues in the Romanian Government and on their Back Benches to bring about the best possible legislation for children and to see that it is put into practice nationally.

What are we asking our Government to do? I suggest to my hon. Friend the Minister that there is an overwhelming case for continuing humanitarian aid, for considering use of a know-how fund, for medical and teaching experts from the United Kingdom and for easement of visa payments and time delays for similar Romanian experts. After all, we seek the backing of the Government for our own initiative to put these children high on the political agenda, so that the rights of the Romanian child are never violated again.

I spoke earlier of the evils of communism, as displayed by the horror and tragedy of these lovely children. As parliamentarians, we pride ourselves on being omnipotent and omnicompetent, yet we cannot expect to solve all Romania's problems. We can and should, as the mother of Parliaments, be firmly associated with the relief of suffering. We shall be in touch with all our colleagues and we seek the sympathy, forbearance and understanding of this place.

10.5 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this Adjournment debate. As the hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) said, this appeal stems directly from a visit of the all-party group on eastern European Jewry to Romania. My hon. and learned Friend the member for Leicester, West (Mr. Janner), my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths) and the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Sumberg) participated in our visit to children's home No. 6, which is a home for seven to 16-year-old boys. There are 400 boys in the home, 370 of whom are termed socially abandoned.

The hon. Member for Torridge and Devon, West has more international experience than me, but as a former schoolteacher I was horrified by the sight that greeted us

in home No. 6. It was almost a three-dimensional step into a world that I did not believe existed, except in a celluloid representation of Auschwitz and Belsen.

The children whom we met were dressed in dark blue uniforms. Some of them had their heads shaved and others had full heads of hair. Those who had their heads shaved were more energetic, more kinetic, in their appearance. The only conclusion that I could draw was that those children had had their heads shaved for one reason—that if they escaped from the home, if they penetrated its barriers, they would be easily identifiable by the community at large and could be returned to the home. It was as barbaric as that.

In one dormitory, there were more than 40 beds for enuretic children. They were huddled together and had no blankets. The stench of urine that met us was overpowering. The care workers—I would call them warders—were graduates of the school. They were two or three years older than the children and had keys on their belts. The doors were locked at night and the children were left to care for themselves. Given the corporate denial of human rights, it was not surprising that there were marks on their heads.

As a result of that experience, we put our points to the President and to the Prime Minister. I know that the political situation in Romania is unstable, but they are taking the children out of the wilderness, out of the darkness, and into the 1990s. Children have been part of the darkness in Romania because Ceausescu decreed a healthy society. Therefore, there was no need for child care specialists or for child care policy; everyone was healthy. Therefore, the children were completely abandoned.

There is a high degree of mental handicap in Romania, but, from the contacts that I have had with the medical and social experts who have been there, I understand that that is because the children have been given no environmental stimuli. One group of psychologists from Ireland who visited Romania said before they went that they thought that it would be hard to make proper assessments of the children's intellectual potential. However, after their visit they said that they could not make any assessment of the general level of retardation by western standards, simply because of the lack of environmental stimulation. There were no children in Britain with whom to compare them.

It has been said that a society can be judged by the way in which it treats its children. If we judged Romania on that basis, it would have no future. However, it does have a future: it is in a changing political position with an embryonic political democracy, and it needs western assistance, both material and professional. It was that realisation on our part that set us to work on the idea of a parliamentary appeal for Romanian children. By establishing the group, and by obtaining your support, Mr. Speaker—we are all very grateful to you for giving your time—we will send a message to Romania saying, "No, you are not forgotten: there is a future for you, and we are ready to help."

Just as the political position in Romania is embryonic, so are hopes. We have no master plan for action in Romania, but it is worth setting up a group at the highest level to say that we—at the highest level—will do something. We are not acting merely on the one-off basis of a Christmas appeal for home No. 6; we intend to act on a continuing basis to help to establish political democracy in Romania.

In Bucharest, I was fortunate enough to speak to Church leaders. I spoke to Rabbi Rosen, the Chief Rabbi of Bucharest; I also had an audience with the patriarch of Romania and Archbishop Ion Robu, the Catholic Archbishop of Romania. From all three came the message that they could not do it on their own; they needed outside help and assistance.

As Archbishop Ion Robu So graphically said, those Romanian children are deprived because they have no love. No one has ever put their arms around them; no one has fondled them; they have never been told that they are loved. That is what is missing. We must put some light into that society with our deeds in this country, and we can do that only by having a link with Romania involving church leaders, community leaders and politicians. The politicians must be subject to scrutiny from the church leaders, and frrom British volunteers.

I hope that we can prosper in our work at parliamentary level; my experience so far suggests that people have greeted the intiative with a good deal of enthusiasm. I am sure that, with your assistance, Mr. Speaker—and that of the Government—we shall be able to do something for the children, and for Romania as a whole.

With my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South (Mr. Griffiths), I hope to become involved with church leaders in Scotland, and to highlight the plight of children's home No. 6. My hon. Friend has also been working with the Comber Romanian orphanage appeal of Ireland. That appeal has already exceeded 50 per cent. of its target of £500,000. It is working in conjunction with the Jubilee campaign in England. That group has been in Romania for a number of years, and since the December revolution has refurbished four orphanages. It has sent specialist volunteer forces, using material bought in Britain.

It has not given the Romanian Government money. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, South agrees that we do not want money to be given to the Romanian Government because one cannot guarantee how it will be spent. We need to have monitoring in Romania by people from Britain. I stress that money raised here will not be handed over to the Romanian Government but will be used, where we can, as approved by Church leaders in Bucharest and the president, to obviate suffering in a direct way in accordance with our priorities.

This Adjournment debate is but the first step. I am delighted that you, Mr. Speaker, have given us the opportunity to raise this subject. Let us hope that it is the first of many steps whereby we can do something with the many good people of Romania.

10.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd): This debate has been filled with tragedy. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West (Miss Nicholson) and the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) for bringing this important subject before the House.

I know that my hon. Friend has a long-standing interest in the welfare of children, and she knows that I am aware of her work in the Save the Children Fund. All the activities reported to me have shown that anything to

[Mr. Mark Lennox-Boyd]

which she sets her mind is carried out with the greatest possible zeal. I am sure that the same can be said of the hon. Member for Dumbarton. I wish them both the very best of success in the appeal which they have set up for this worthy cause. I hope that the appeal will thrive and grow. I hope that my hon. Friend's contribution to the welfare of these children will be recognised in years to come.

Hon. Members described the appalling conditions in some schools in Romania. I, too, saw some of those reports on television. No one who observed them can fail to be moved by those pictures. The plight of so many abandoned children is certainly one of the most dreadful and unforeseen legacies of the Ceausescu dictatorship.

After the revolution in Romania, Her Majesty's Government moved immediately to provide substantial amounts of humanitarian aid, much of it to improve standards of care for mentally handicapped children. We provided £500,000 for the World Health Organisation's programme of aid to the Romanian health service. Following the shocking revelations about the large numbers of Romanian children diagnosed as HIV positive, we donated 1 million disposable syringes and we have since supplied £75,000-worth of AIDS diagnostic equipment. We have also encouraged longer-term projects, such as a family planning programme organised by Marie Stopes International. The total value of the humanitarian assistance which we have given, both directly through the European Community and through other international organisations such as the World Health Organisation, now stands at over £6·6 million. That must be a sign of the Government's commitment and concern.

None of us should forget the immense generosity of the British people in response to the situation and especially the efforts of all those who are involved in private initiatives to help Romanian children. We have, of course, taken care to ensure that our aid reaches those who need it most. For that reason, we have made contributions to British charities working in Romania. Some have many years' experience of caring for the mentally handicapped. I cannot mention them all tonight, but prominent among them is Mencap, which has been working to improve conditions in the Brincanovesti castle institution and is deeply concerned with education of mentally handicapped children. Our contributions to charities have enabled British doctors and nurses to work in Romania and have provided training in this country for Romanians responsible for the care of mentally handicapped children. We welcome this exchange of expertise and support any initiatives designed to broaden and consolidate contacts between British specialists and their Romanian counterparts.

I agree that the valuable work which is under way to provide assistance to the children of Romania should not be hindered unnecessarily by bureaucracy. However, hon. Members will understand that we are not yet ready to abolish visas for Romanian citizens, although we are, of course, willing to do all that we can to ease the way for Romanian experts to visit the United Kingdom.

I hope, too, that the Romanian authorities concerned will help facilitate the work of British specialists in their country. In that connection, the Government warmly welcome the Romanian ambassador's interest in the question raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and Devon, West. The Romanian embassy in London has been immensely helpful already in arranging visas for a group of Department of Health and Home Office officials who will be visiting Romania later this month to discuss with their counterparts our countries' positions on inter-country adoption. We shall pursue further with the appropriate Romanian authorities ways of cutting through red tape.

Turning now to international efforts to help Romania, I should like to draw the House's attention to the imaginative programme of Community aid drawn up in July by the EC Commission. The programme has been drawn up with the active involvement of European non-governmental organisations, including the Save the Children Fund, and aims to provide help directly to children's homes in Romania—in answer to the point raised by the hon. Member for Dumbarton. We are contributing generously to this programme.

In July, the Commission immediately provided £100,000-worth of aid supplies and sponsored a study to assess the medical and sanitary needs of physically and mentally handicapped children. This made a number of specific recommendations on which the Commission is acting. A special representative has been appointed to work with the Romanian Ministry of Health and to help co-ordinate the efforts of non-governmental organisations and European Community member states. Some £140,000 has been set aside to provide experts and to assist in the management of institutions for mentally and physically handicapped children, and a further £1·9 million has been donated to non-governmental organisations working in Romania. In addition, the Community is setting aside £2·7 million for improved heating and sanitation for 17 orphanages. Aid worth a further £5·25 million has been earmarked for early 1991, and a Romanian request for an additional £4·6 million for the purchase of foodstuffs is currently under consideration.

We wholeheartedly welcome that initiative, which will build on the good work that has already been done by the organisations that have provided emergency relief. We shall continue to work closely with our partners in the EC, as that has proved the most efficient means of co-ordinating humanitarian aid to Romania. Furthermore, I shall ensure that the problem of children in state educational institutions is brought to the attention of the Commission and I hope that that will provide a further basis for future co-operation.

The only solution to Romania's long-term problems, including proper provision for its children, is through good government and a sound economy. As my hon. Friend is aware, this Government have made it clear that we will consider extending the know-how fund to Romania once democratic and free market reforms have been introduced in that country.

Mr. Harry Barnes (Derbyshire, North-East): Emese Gabor is the one mentally handicapped child I know of who has been adopted in this country, and a parliamentary answer on 22 October confirmed that. The Minister mentioned Mencap, which has been assisting in connection with that adoption. The director of Brincanovesti, Dr. Delast, was in this country with the support of Bristol Mencap and visited Bev and Ruth Smith in Killamarsh in my constituency. Bev Smith had to go

four times to Romania to arrange Emese's adoption. Tomorrow I shall send a copy of *Hansard* to my constituents, who have great expertise in these matters.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The hon. Gentleman has made his point. I invite him also to send his constituents a copy of our earlier Adjournment debate on the subject, to which my hon. Friend the Minister of Health replied.

As I was saying, we shall consider extending the know-how fund. Similarly, in the interests of encouraging good government, we have pressed for strict conditionality in the granting of technical co-operation and other developmental assistance and aid by the G24 nations. The strict conditionality does not apply to humanitarian aid, but the policy that we have enunciated for the other forms of aid is shared by many other western countries. It is intended to encourage the Romanian leadership to follow the path of political and economic liberalisation, and there are already some encouraging signs that it it beginning to have some effect.

The effects of the Ceausescu regime's appalling policies will take many years to erase from Romania. In the shorter term, the humanitarian aid supplied by this and other western countries, and the tremendous effort of so many groups and individuals, will help to relieve the sufferings of the most vulnerable of the dictatorship's victims. My hon. Friend's initiative is particularly welcome as it envisages not only immediate assistance but a programme of education and training which will be of lasting benefit and will enable the children concerned to live fuller lives and perhaps even to contribute to the rebuilding of their country. Most of all, it is to be hoped that the political will exists in Romania to enable the necessary reforms to establish democracy and economic freedom which are the best guarantees for the country's future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-eight minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 16 November 1990

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Road Safety

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Patnick.]*

9.35 am

The Minister for Roads and Traffic (Mr. Christopher Chope): I am delighted to be able to introduce a debate on a very important matter. I am also delighted that so many of my parliamentary colleagues are in the House, and that Oppositon Members are here, too. In particular, I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) is in the Chamber. During his distinguished tenure of the office that I am now privileged to hold as Minister for Roads and Traffic he staked out a distinctive line on road safety policy. He campaigned for and promoted vigorously his passionate belief in road safety. I hope that he will contribute to the debate.

We shall shortly be introducing road traffic legislation to implement the proposal set out in the White Paper "The Road User and the Law' that we published last year. By updating the framework within which drivers use roads, it will make a significant contribution to road safety. This morning, however, we are to consider the wider approach to road safety or, as one might more precisely describe it, casualty reduction.

Casualty reduction is what road safety is about: safety on the move. All human endeavour involves some risk. That applies particularly to transport which, in some way or another, involves us all. The potential for accidents and injuries is immense, but the fact that large numbers of people move vast distances each day in safety shows the extent to which the risks involved have been minimised. However, accidents happen, sometimes with tragic consequences.

Safety in transport is a key priority of my Department. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport launched earlier this year the Safety-on-the-Move campaign which is aimed at every user of all forms of transport. Every day millions of transport users take unnecessary risks and are involved in accidents which could so easily be avoided simply by the greater application of care and common sense. Absolute safety can never be guaranteed, but we must work hard to learn from past mistakes and encourage each individual to think about what he or she can do to protect their own safety and that of others.

In no area of transport is the concept of personal responsibility more important than in road transport, where nine out of every 10 accidents involve human error. Any air, sea or rail transport disaster involving substantial loss of life makes the headlines, and rightly so. Fortunately, that does not happen very often. Indeed, it is the rarity of such events, as well as the loss of life, that makes them newsworthy. Occasionally, because of the number of people and vehicles involved, a road accident will make the headlines, but day after day tragedies are happening on a smaller scale throughout the country. On average, 14 people are killed and 165 seriously injured on our roads every day of the year. That is 100 people killed every week. That is the price, in wasted and ruined lives, that we pay for the convenience and flexibility of road transport on which we all depend. The financial price is equally daunting—some £6 billion each year.

Distressing as the casualty figures are, our present road safety record represents a considerable improvement on the mid-1960s, when there were nearly 400,000 casualties each year, including almost 8,000 fatalities. Since then, the number of fatalities has fallen by one third despite a 250 per cent. increase in traffic. Our record is one of the best in Europe. We have a casualty rate of 9·2 deaths per 100,000 population, compared with 33·2 deaths per 100,000 in Portugal, 22·7 in Luxembourg, 21·1 in Spain, 20·6 in France and 13·4 in what was the Federal Republic of Germany.

Despite our record position compared with other European countries, we should not be and we are not, complacent. That is why in 1987 we set the target of a reduction in casualties by one third of their 1981-85 average annual level by the end of the century. That target was based on a fundamental and far-reaching interdepartmental review of road safety policy, which reported in 1986.

Before reviewing the general progress towards this demanding target, I wish to tell the House what I consider to be the single most important measure which can be taken by the Government further to reduce deaths and injuries to car occupants. I am pleased to be able to tell the House that I am issuing a consultation paper this morning inviting comments on a proposal to extend the law on seat belt wearing in cars and taxis to apply to adults as well as children in rear seats of vehicles where seat belts are fitted. I have arranged for copies of the consultation document to be placed in the Library.

Compulsory wearing of front seat belts was introduced in 1983. That simple requirement has yielded a tremendous return in human and economic terms. At least 200 deaths and 7,000 serious injuries have been avoided each year, and, as a result, significant resources have been released in the health service. Compulsory restraint of child rear seat passengers was introduced just over a year ago and is having similar benefits.

Existing seat belt legislation has shown that people will respond to laws which they perceive to be sensible and beneficial. This country has one of the highest front seat belt wearing rates in the world, with about 92 per cent. compliance. We believe that public opinion now favours the extension of legislation to cover adults in rear seats.

A Gallup poll commissioned earlier this year by the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety shows that 82 per cent. of people favour compulsory wearing of seat belts. All the major organisations involved in transport and safety—the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders, the British Medical Association, the Automobile Association, the Royal Automobile Club and the police—support the introduction of this requirement. There has been a legal requirement for all new vehicles produced since 1987 to be fitted with rear seat belts. Many older cars also have them, so the new laws will affect at least six out of every 10 cars.

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

Extension of the law on wearing seat belts is the single most important and cost effective way to reduce casualties among car occupants, who make up more than half of all those killed on our roads. Wearing rear seat belts will also reduce casualties among front seat passengers in the event of a crash. It is estimated that this will save 100 lives each year and prevent 1,000 serious injuries. With such huge benefits available, we must not delay.

The casualty savings will be even greater as the proportion of cars fitted with rear seat belts rises each year. The new law can be introduced by regulation made under existing powers in the Road Traffic Act 1988.

We are inviting comments on the consultation paper to be sent to us by the end of January 1991. Subject to those, and to the approval of the House, it is my intention to bring the regulations into force by the middle of next year.

People in cars which already have rear seat belts fitted need not, and should not, wait for this additional legislation. Indeed, it is common sense that belts should be worn now. We have always made it clear that reducing the number of casualties is a shared responsibility. The Government cannot achieve the target alone. A feature of the past two or three years has been the development of an alliance of interests, involving the public and private sectors. Reflecting this growing concern, and to some degree fostering it, is the responsible attitude of the media, which now report road safety as news, discuss the issues involved, and campaign for change and improvements.

I also acknowledge the support of the many interests involved, especially those in the private sector which have helped us to bring the road safety message alive by associating it with products and services in daily use. The brewing industry has been particularly supportive of our campaign against drinking and driving and, with the National Licensed Victuallers Association has launched a number of major initiatives and has put great effort into the development and marketing of low-alcohol and non-alcoholic drinks. The insurance industry has helped, both collectively and individually. I pay particular tribute to General Accident, which has made a major contribution. Household names sucnh as Kwik-fit, Autoglass, Halfords and, most recently, Texaco, have provided valuable sponsorship for departmental road safety initiatives and have developed ideas of their own.

Motoring associations continue to play their part on behalf of responsible road users, and throughout the police have proved steadfast in their support. They are usually the first on the scene of an accident and they have to break the terrible news to families waiting at home. They know at first hand the importance of reducing the number of casualties, and of minimising the injuries which occur when accidents happen.

In paying tribute to those who have taken up the road safety issue, it has to be said that, with a few notable exceptions, vehicle manufacturers have not normally provided the lead that we might have hoped for. Until recently, they have continued to give prominence to speed and performance rather than safety when developing and marketing their products. It is encouraging that, as the public perception of the motor car changes, manufacturers are increasingly developing safe and more environmentally acceptable vehicles which meet public demand. It used to be thought that safety did not sell vehicles. I am pleased to say that that no longer appears to be the case. In the past few days, yet another major car manufacturer has declared:

> "Our research indicates that our potential customers now place more weight on car safety than on any other issue . . . the old industry saying that safety does not sell will have to change in the 1990s. In the coming decade it is safety that will sell cars."

If this is true, it is among the best bits of transport news of the year.

I shall now review progress towards developing measures to achieve the targeted reduction in road casualties of one third by the year 2000. The Government's strategy is to concentrate on three areas: first, to raise the level of public awareness and response so that road safety is seen as an issue for society; secondly, to focus on the most vulnerable road users—children, the elderly, pedestrians, cyclists and motor cyclists; thirdly, to concentrate on proven cost-effective casualty reduction measures, principally in vehicle and road engineering.

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): My hon. Friend mentioned cycling. Great progress has been made in our major cities to provide for cyclists. I think that about 90,000 cyclists come into London every day, and the number is increasing. Are the Government going to make progress, so that cars are cleared off the principal routes and cycle tracks are provided throughout the capital, so that we can get about much better on two wheels than on four?

Mr. Chope: I shall deal with cycling in more detail later in my speech. Last week, I was pleased to be able to attend a seminar and give extra backing to the campaign for a 1,000-mile cycle route in London. I also spoke at the rally in Trafalgar square on the previous Sunday, along with the hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) and other hon. Members. I think that my hon. Friend underestimates the number of people cycling in London. It is estimated that more than 1 million people regularly use bicycles as their principal means of getting to and from work. I share my hon. Friend's interest in cycling.

In developing a structured approach, the task breaks naturally into three sections—the road, the vehicle and the road user. The building of roads should not be seen solely in terms of increasing mobility, reducing congestion and shortening journey times. Although those are important objectives, new roads are also safer roads for vehicles and their occupants. Equally important, there are safety and environmental benefits from moving traffic out of town centres and reducing conflict with other road users, such as pedestrians and cyclists. All major road building developments are subject to a cost-benefit analysis. To ensure that that analysis gives full weight to casualty savings, the monetary value to be placed on preventing a fatality has been increased to £600,000 and work is in progress on reassessing the full costs of serious injuries.

I want to maximise the safety benefits from our expanded roads programme. From next April, all new road schemes prepared by the Department will be audited for road safety during their design and before their opening. Road safety audits are formal checks during the road planning and construction process, carried out by staff with safety expertise, independent of the design team. The same process can be applied to local highway schemes. Guidance for local authorities has recently been published by the Institution of Highways and Transportation.

Large-scale road building is not the only way in which highway engineers can improve road safety. Local road safety schemes providing remedial measures at problem sites can make a substantial contribution to reducing accidents and are extremely cost effective. Last year, we announced that we will be significantly increasing our spending on such schemes on trunk roads. We are anxious that local authorities, too, should increase the number of schemes on local roads, where most accidents occur.

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): The Minister spoke about a road safety audit on new road schemes, which, of course, is to be welcomed. Will he also introduce a scheme of road safety audit on existing trunk roads? For example, in rural areas, many trunk roads through villages still do not have footpaths for pedestrians.

Mr. Chope: The Department is always looking at road safety issues on the trunk roads for which we are responsible, and our agents are normally in close touch with the details of any particular location. I assure the hon. and learned Gentleman that substantial resources are put into road safety schemes where there will be some proven benefit from them. Obviously I cannot guarantee that the whole trunk road network will have pedestrian sidewalks incorporated in it. Each case will be looked at on its merits.

Mr. Nigel Spearing (Newham, South): I thank the Minister for his reference to cycling. On pedestrians and trunk roads, is not the hon. Gentleman's performance not concomitant with his words? Is he aware that the Minister with responsibility for docklands transport has declined to put a footbridge across the heavily used A13 trunk road in my constituency for use by pedestrians, on the grounds that there are four closely spaced existing subways and public money cannot be used, despite millions of pounds of expenditure on new roads in the area? Should not pedestrians be given the choice? Everyone knows that subways have hazards. The refusal to spend a few thousand pounds on that work surely shows contempt for my constituents and for pedestrians who wish to cross that road.

Mr. Chope: The hon. Gentleman overstates the general case. I am not familiar with the details of the matter, but I shall do my utmost to make myself familiar with them.

Mr. Harry Greenway (Ealing, North): The hon. Member for Newham, South (Mr. Spearing) made a valid point about subways. Rapes have occurred in the subway at the Target roundabout on the A40. My hon. Friend the Minister uses that road often. Elderly people in particular never use the subway, so they run across the A40, taking their chance against traffic racing along, sometimes illegally at 90 mph. We must do something about that.

Mr. Chope: I share my hon. Friend's anxiety, but subways are a much safer means by which to cross a road than crossing at the same level as that used by ordinary traffic. Sometimes the subways are controversial and people are afraid of using them. It is important, as far as possible, to separate pedestrians from traffic.

In January this year, we announced our decision to extend eligibility for transport supplementary grant to schemes on all local authority roads rather than limiting it to roads of more than local importance, as has been done in the past. This decision follows the recommendation by a joint Department of Transport local authority working group, which reported last year. By encouraging more authorities to eliminate known accident blackspots, this financial incentive will help considerably in achieving our national target.

The bids which we have received have shown that many local highway authorities have responded enthusiastically to this new opportunity. I hope that those authorities will continue this important work and that, with the prospect of more financial assistance, more authorities will feel encouraged to implement these practical road safety measures. We shall announce details of the TSG settlement next month.

Local authorities have a crucial role to perform in road safety. I particularly welcome the constructive way in which they have adopted the targeted approach as recommended in the excellent road safety code of good practice, which the local authority associations published just over a year ago. I am now reviewing with local authorities, in the current round of regional annual consultative meetings, their progress in setting local targets and drawing up road safety plans for achieving them.

Road engineering can be used also to control vehicle access and limit speed. The road hump regulations made last March give much more freedom to local authorities about installing humps. Guidance on the regulations has been issued this week. Much interest and support has been expressed following the consultation exercise on our proposals to facilitate the introduction of 20 mph limit zones in residential areas. The guidelines to local highway authorities on circumstances where these may be suitable will be issued before Christmas.

I know that many councils are keen to start introducing these new limits—indeed, four have already applied. If introduced as part of a comprehensive programme of safety management and targeted on the areas with the worst problems, they can have a major impact, particularly in improving our child road accident record.

On vehicle safety, improvements in vehicle construction standards offer the most potential of significant reductions in road casualties but require agreement in the European Community. I believe that the European Community as a whole should see this as a much higher priority than it does at present, given the benefits for all member states. We estimate that proven improvements in vehicle design would prevent 200,000 lives and serious injuries each year in the European Community.

I should like to mention two particular issues. The first is the need to make cars safer, especially for the occupants. We know that there is much scope for making all cars better able to withstand impacts. I should particularly like to see early agreement in the European Community on a side impact standard. The United States Government have already announced their intention to introduce such standards. It is sad that we were not able to introduce them as quickly in Europe. So far, there has been no agreement between member states on this vital point.

The second issue is the need to reduce the extremely high level of motor cycle casualties. Motor cyclists' heads and legs are most at risk. We are pressing strongly that there should be no dilution in existing United Kingdom standards for motor cycle helmets because of the need to agree a standard within the European Community. Sometimes there is a danger that we may end up in European Community regulations with the lowest common denominator. It would be sad if that meant that we were not able to have the higher standards which we

[Mr. Chope]

think are necessary. On my recent visit to the transport and road research laboratory, it was clear that even our British standard for motor cycle helmets has scope for further improvement and enhancement.

We are also anxious that manufacturers should voluntarily introduce improved leg protection on motor cycles, at least on some machines, so that those motor cyclists who want greater safety can obtain a suitable machine. Leg injuries account for as much as 60 per cent. of all serious injuries to motor cyclists. The transport and road research laboratory has demonstrated that it is possible to design a motor cycle with leg protection that does not detract from its styling. The big motor cycle manufacturers have used specious arguments in opposing such protectors, and their arguments have often been based on special pleading.

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): Am I right in saying that if the parents of a person involved in a motor bike crash in the United States—or the person himself—wanted to make a product liability claim against the manufacturer of the bike because it has not made leg protectors available even as an option, the public information from the transport and road research laboratory would be available to the lawyers?

Mr. Chope: The research published by the transport and road research laboratory is public and is available to all countries. I am sure that those who represent people in such cases in the United States would be well advised to take note of the laboratory's valuable research in this area. The whole House will agree that it is extraordinary that leg protection is not available as an option on all machines.

The safety of road users is the most important area in terms of the potential for casualty reduction as in more than 90 per cent. of accidents human error is a crucial factor. Yet it is the most difficult area in which to make progress as one relies on influencing human behaviour. Our approach has been to divide road users into two broad groups: vehicle occupants and vulnerable road users—those without the protection of a vehicle and the secondary safety features that it possesses. The vulnerable road users are pedestrians, cyclists, and especially child pedestrians and child cyclists.

We are seeking to improve the safety of vulnerable road users. Young motor cyclists are five times more likely than young car drivers to be involved in an accident and they are 18 times more likely to be killed or seriously injured. For a 17-year-old motor cyclist without any experience, the chance of having an accident in his first year is, on average, 100 per cent. Not all 17-year-old motor cyclist have an accident in their first year, so that means that many of them have more than one accident. That emphasises how dangerous it is for young motor cyclists on our roads.

We have tightened up the training and testing requirements for motor cyclists. Last year, we introduced a stiffer on-road test in which the examiner follows the candidate around the test course with radio communications. Since then, we have been developing with the motor cycle industry arrangements for compulsory basic training for new motor cyclists, which will come into effect at the beginning of next month. Holders of provisional licences issued on or after 1 December will not be permitted to ride on the roads on their own until the basic training courses have been completed and the instructors are satisfied that they are safe.

Once on the road, learner motor cyclists are now no longer allowed to carry pillion passengers. The presence of a pillion passenger significantly alters the handling characteristics of motor cycles and has a marked adverse effect on the light-weight machines on which learners ride.

We have also tightened up the law on learner drivers by introducing minimum qualifications for those who accompany them. They must now be at least 21 years old and have held a full licence for at least three years.

Children are an especially vulnerable group of road users. Road accidents are the greatest cause of accidental child deaths. Last year, almost 9,000 children up to the age of 15 were killed or seriously injured in road accidents, which is the equivalent of 25 each day of the year. In May this year, we launched a major initiative to improve our child road safety record. The initiative has been given tremendous support by local authorities and their road safety officers, by school teachers, by voluntary organisations, by the police and by the private sector.

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Education about road safety is an important topic. Is it not true that some schools have no road safety training and that there is no uniform provision in our schools?

Mr. Chope: That is right. The Government's objective is to improve the record of schools in teaching road safety. It is fair and reasonable that each school should go about it in its own way, but the need for all schools to teach road safety is paramount. The statistics show that too many pupils are taught far too little at school about road safety.

Our programme for child safety is extensive. It is set out in our policy statement, "Children and Roads—a Safe Way", which is available in the Library of the House. Our strategy has three main elements. We are seeking to slow traffic in residential areas where children are at greatest risk, to improve road safety education and to encourage parents and motorists to take greater responsibility for child road safety.

I am delighted that the public expenditure plans for the next three years, set out by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, include the provision of up to £10 million for a sustained campaign on child road safety. The first phase of the campaign was launched last month under the banner of our Safety-on-the-move campaign and focused on child pedestrians. Its main elements were a television commercial which was designed to bring home to parents and to motorists the scale of the problem and 13 million leaflets for parents and drivers giving advice on what they can do to ensure that children are safe on our roads. The leaflets were distributed by local authority road safety officers and they are still available. Copies are also available from various major high street outlets.

Our campaign was immediately followed by one of equal scale which was launched by Texaco with the catchy slogan,

"Children should be seen and not hurt."

I want to emphasise again how much we appreciate the tremendous effort that the private sector has put into our child safety initiative.

Next spring, the next phase of the campaign will focus on child cyclists. For all cyclists—not only child cyclists

—cycling is a healthy, socially acceptable and environmentally friendly form of transport. There is a resurgence of activity in it and I am keen to assist that, but I am very concerned about the safety risks involved. Cyclist fatalities last year were 30 per cent. higher than in 1988 and almost 300 cyclists were killed. Serious and slight casualties were up by 4 per cent. and 21 per cent. respectively, and just over half of cyclist casualties suffer head injuries.

All such injuries would be made less serious if helmets were used and, in many cases, the only damage would be to the helmet. Research carried out in the United States shows that cycle helmets prevent 80 per cent. of all serious head injuries. The transport and road research laboratory has calculated that if all cyclists wore helmets, 4,000 casualties a year would be saved and 3,000 serious head injuries would be reduced to slight injuries. We should be negligent if we did not make those facts known.

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): As a car driver, I am aware of the role of cyclists in moving about our cities. Many courier companies in London are now using cyclists and they do not always allocate head gear to the riders. The problem for vehicle drivers is that they cannot see cyclists as they weave in and out of the traffic at Hyde Park corner, at Marble Arch, in Trafalgar square or in any city centre. Please will cyclists be encouraged at the very least to wear dayglo vests so that we can see them? Motorists are not unsympathetic to cyclists, but cyclists are very difficult to spot.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is right; conspicuity is vital for any cyclist who is concerned about his or her safety. Parents should ensure that when their children go out on bicycles, they can be seen by other road users.

Some cyclists consider that we should not be encouraging the wearing of cycle helmets. The Cyclists Touring Club has written to road safety officers discouraging them from promoting cycle helmets, and the club says that helmets will not reduce accidents. It is obviously correct in that, but helmets will reduce injuries and save lives.

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): The Minister is making a helpful suggestion, but perhaps he should consider making it compulsory for tiny children who ride on the back of their mother's bikes and who are incredibly vulnerable to wear helmets. Does my hon. Friend have any suggestions to make on that subject?

Mr. Chope: I do not have a specific answer to that, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right to draw attention to it. I am sure that some of those who carry children on the back of their bikes are not fully aware of the dangers.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: I want not to follow the argument advanced by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) but to refer to the Cyclists Touring Club advice. It should be clearly stated that that advice is wrong and in some cases lethal. The New England Journal of Medicine shows that 80 per cent. of cyclists who die in accidents have sustained head injuries and that such injuries can be reduced by 80 per cent. if a cycle helmet is used. I do not want to consider the question of compulsion, but any responsible cyclist should advise others to wear helmets. I saw the representative of the Cyclists Touring Club who gave the advice while he was supervising his child in a swimming pool. Perhaps I may draw an analogy: sending a child out without a cycle helmet is equivalent to sending him into a swimming pool without making provision to save him from drowning.

Mr. Chope: That is a telling and helpful analogy. When I spoke at the rally in Trafalgar square, I was horrified to find myself being heckled when I said that it was important that people should wear helmets. A vocal group of cyclists opposes cycle helmets, but I think that many cyclists realise how important they are. We must make it more socially acceptable for school children to wear cycle helmets, and we are anxiously considering how we can make the wearing of helmets trendy, just as it has become trendy to wear a skateboard helmet. Improvements in the design of cycle helmets have helped considerably, but there is still a long way to go.

Mr. Harry Greenway: As chairman of the Parliamentary Friends of Cycling, I warmly support what my hon. Friend is saying. What is his Department doing to develop a policy on the wearing of safety helmets for cyclists, for horse riders under the age of 18—under the Greenway Act—and for skateboarders? That would be a good policy. If an all-purpose helmet for children can be produced, we shall no doubt have them for older people in due course. That will be to everyone's advantage and will help to save lives.

Mr. Chope: I assure the House that one of the most important messages in our next publicity campaign will be that no child should be allowed by a parent to cycle on the road without training and without a helmet. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Greenway) and thank him once more for his efforts in connection with the Horses (Protective Headgear for Young Riders) Act 1990. As my hon. Friend knows, I was pleased to issue a consultation document earlier this week on the regulations that are needed to implement that important legislation.

We are seeking to persuade drivers to use the road more safely. The most direct way of influencing driver behaviour is through legislation. The road traffic Bill to be introduced shortly is designed to improve the contribution that the law makes to road safety through its influence on driver behaviour. We aim to establish a closer link between the law's demands and safety on the roads. We intend to simplify and clarify the law so that it is better understood, and to encourage the use of warnings and education. Where persuasion fails, more effective enforcement and tougher penalties are needed. Our reforms will ensure that enforcement measures and penalties are better designed to deter and punish the bad driver and the drink-driver.

Drinking and driving is driver behaviour at its worst. It is the largest single cause of road accidents in Britain, accounting for an estimated 840 deaths in 1988—the last year for which figures are available. That is why we attach particular importance to tackling the problem and why our anti-drink driving campaign continues to be given such high priority. That sustained campaign has been successful in changing attitudes. Drinking and driving is now seen as thoroughly anti-social behaviour, and we shall be developing that theme further in our Christmas campaign.

Legislation has been an important factor in influencing attitudes to drinking and driving, as have the actions of the police in enforcing the law. Last year, there was a steady increase in the number of screening breath tests, which

[Mr. Chope]

exceeded 540,000—22 per cent. more than in 1988. I know that some think that we should have random breath tests. But the fact that there are already half a million breath tests a year shows that the police are very active in this matter. At present, they concentrate on those whom they suspect of driving under the influence of alcohol and on those who have been involved in road accidents. The chances of people being able to drink and drive without getting caught have been significantly reduced by the number of breath tests.

Mr. John P. Smith: There may have been a dramatic increase in the number of tests carried out, but it is important that drivers who drink should perceive that they will get caught. Does not the Government's own research, carried out by the transport and road research laboratory, show that the majority of drivers who drink think that the chances of getting caught are very small? New punishments will not be a deterrent if drivers do not think that they will get caught.

Mr. Chope: I think that perceptions are changing. Drivers think not only of their chances of getting caught but of what will happen if they are caught. A few years ago, some people's attitude to drink-driving was that one should not breach the 11th commandment—"Thou shalt not get caught"—but these days drink-driving is regarded as very anti-social. One does not get much sympathy from one's peer group if one is caught drinking and driving—a fact which recent examples have brought home to us.

I do not think that random breath testing is necessary. The police have tremendous discretion and, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary said earlier this year, it is appropriate to leave the law as it is. I emphasise that there were 22 per cent. more breath tests last year than there were the year before. If the police continue at that rate, it will not be long before we have 1 million breath tests a year. It would be wrong, however, if so many people were stopped by the police and asked to take breath tests—only to be sent on their way because the tests were negative—that people began to view breath testing as they did the use of the stop-and-search laws on the streets of London. One can always make a case for increasing police powers, but we should be cautious about giving greater discretion to the police in this matter.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No doubt we can debate the matter further when the road traffic Bill is introduced. The hon. Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) raised a point about perceptions which ought to be dealt with straight away.

Even in New South Wales, where random testing is carried out on a scale that would lead in this country to 24 million tests a year, three out of four people caught are caught in targeted testing.

Am I right in saying that it would not be appropriate for a transport Minister to draw attention to the fact that, on Merseyside, half those tested are charged, which suggests that there, there is not enough testing?

Mr. Chope: I do not think that I need comment on my hon. Friend's pertinent point, although I hope that when we debate the issue further people will heed his comments.

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): Could not we be a little more positive about the question? Will my hon. Friend consider further the suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) that we should install breath kits in places of entertainment so that people may make their own assessment of their condition and of their fitness to drive? Some people are not aware of their condition and they do not know whether they should be driving. It is easy to be doubtful, but some people do not know whether they are in the doubtful state. We should be encouraging people to take more care of themselves instead of placing additional burdens on the police, who already have considerable difficulty with the public's attitude towards them. Instead of always depending on the police to take action, should we not be encouraging more people to act for themselves?

Mr. Chope: I was in the Chamber when my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Sir I. Lloyd) raised that issue in a ten-minute Bill. He received much support on that occasion. However, it is a controversial subject. At the moment there is no restriction on public houses purchasing such machines if they so wish. There is not much evidence that many have been installed, but I do not want to deprive people of the freedom to purchase them. However, I am not minded to make that compulsory.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does not the Minister accept that it would be extremely dangerous to follow that line? It would encourage people to drink up to the limit, but the full alcohol effect may not occur for some time after they have done that. People may leave the public house believing that they are fit to drive when they are not. It is extremely dangerous to suggest that we should move down that path. The simple message should be, "If you drink, don't drive."

Mr. Chope: I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman's final comment, and his earlier point is an argument against the proposal from my hon. Friend the Member for Havant. I would not want to ban those devices, but there is precious little evidence that people want to buy them.

This Christmas we will once again receive a great deal of support from the police for our Christmas drink-driving campaign. No doubt hon. Members will have seen the Metropolitan police announcement about that yesterday. I am grateful for the support of the police. We will be launching our official campaign on 4 December.

To reinforce our fight against drinking and driving, we announced earlier this year an extension of the scope of the high risk offenders scheme under which the most serious drink-drive offenders are required to satisfy the Secretary of State on the basis of a medical examination that they do not have a drink problem and are otherwise fit to drive before their licences are returned after a period of disqualification. The measure has been widely welcomed.

Even when the driver is not under the influence of drink, accidents happen and most involve human error. We do not know enough about human behaviour to understand why people take risks, fail to see a pedestrian or misjudge distances and speeds. An increase in our knowledge in that respect could be of enormous benefit in reducing road accidents by enabling us to design roads and vehicles to minimise the chance of error and by helping us to improve the effectiveness of our publicity material.

We have therefore set up a programme of behavioural research which we hope will begin to find answers to those questions. That is long-term strategic research with

potentially huge returns. Our roads and vehicle safety research programme exceeds £8 million a year and includes more than £700,000 for the behavioural aspect.

As drinking and driving declines, and as safer roads and cars are produced, any progress in casualty reduction will depend more on changing driver attitudes. The next target must be attitudes towards speed. Inappropriate speed is a contributory factor in 30 per cent. of all accidents in which as many as 1,500 people die each year.

A year ago my predecessor expressed concern at the extent to which speed featured in car advertisements. I met representatives of the Advertising Standards Authority at the Independent Broadcasting Authority and I was impressed by the seriousness with which they are approaching that difficult area. I am pleased that action has recently been taken against some of the more flagrant examples of advertising excessive speed.

As people will know, last year there was significant increase in deaths on our roads and particularly among car occupants on rural single carriageway roads and minor rural roads. Many of the accidents on those roads involve no other vehicle and are caused by drivers overestimating their ability to control their cars at speed. Such roads have an upper speed limit of 60 mph. Too many drivers have still not got the message that speed limits are the maximum permitted speed and not the desired or recommended speed. A speed of 60 mph is quite unsafe for many country roads, particularly when driving conditions are difficult.

Drivers of other vehicles have an equal responsibility to drive at an appropriate speed. The mandatory fitting of speed limiters to coaches will ensure that they cannot break the limit on motorways. Recent speed surveys show how effective limiters are. Many car drivers feel intimidated by heavy goods vehicles. Although they have a low accident involvement rate, the accidents involving those vehicles that occur can have horrific consequences. It is of particular concern that the drivers of the very heaviest of lorries are among those who break the speed limits most. They compound the offence by driving close to the vehicles in front of them.

Mr. Roger King: My hon. Friend has outlined the problems, but why do we not consider the solutions and introduce speed limiters for heavy goods vehicles? Surely that is long overdue. The tachograph is not satisfactory: it simply monitors what has happened after the event. If speed limiters are applicable to coaches—and rightly so—why should they not be applicable to 38 and 40 tonne heavy goods vehicles?

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend has made a fair point, and there is a healthy debate about that not just in this country but in Europe. Such limiters may come about eventually, but, as my hon. Friend said, the tachograph is important evidence of the speeds at which lorries have been travelling. We need to ensure that those who are responsible for lorry drivers have greater regard to the tachograph evidence of the speeds at which lorries are travelling. Nevertheless, I understand my hon. Friend's point.

Sir Philip Goodhart (Beckenham): Before my hon. Friend ends his comments on speed, will he refer to the Government's attitude toward speed cameras? Many of us believe that the introduction of speed cameras will cut the death toll quite dramatically. I understand that the Government intend to legalise the use of speed cameras at accident black spots. Will legislation be drafted to allow the use of speed cameras to be expanded without further primary legislation?

Mr. Chope: I cannot anticipate the details of the road traffic Bill which will be published shortly. However, I do not think that my hon. Friend will be disappointed by its contents.

The casualty saving potential of improvements to vehicle safety standards is obviously enormous. The 1987 road safety review report, on which our target is based, assumed that 40 per cent. of the one third reduction in casualties would come from vehicle safety measures. The delay in reaching agreement in Europe on the necessary changes has clear implications for the attainment of our target, particularly given the lead times involved in manufacture. Nevertheless, that target remains firmly our goal. By any standards it is a tough objective. If we are to achieve it with only a limited contribution on the vehicles front, we shall have to redouble our efforts on other fronts.

I have done my best to outline the Government's strategy for making road travel safer, but that cannot be achieved by the Government alone. Progress depends on the willingness and concern of society and ultimately on the response and responsibility of individuals. The Government's role is to provide a lead and a framework. That is why we have developed a targeted approach based on the structured implementation of cost-effective measures of which our intention to require the compulsory wearing of rear seat belts, where fitted, by adults as well as by children is the best example. Our aim is to save 1,700 lives and avoid 20,000 serious injuries a year by the end of the century. On road safety, I am proud to say that we lead the world, but that is a matter in which being the best is not good enough. We can, and must, do even better.

10.29 am

Ms. Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): This is my first opportunity to debate with the Minister in his new post, to which I welcome him. This is probably not the day on which to begrudge the Government their few moments of self-congratulation. They surely have little enough on which to congratulate themselves at the moment.

This debate on road safety, which comes almost exactly a year after the last such debate, allows the Minister and his Back-Bench colleagues to bask in the comforting feeling that, despite the deepening recession and chaos all around them, something positive has been achieved in the past year. Opposition Members at least are happy to debate road safety again and we thank the Minister for the opportunity.

The Minister quite properly gave us a run-down of his Department's activities over the past year. Certainly, if we are to measure the success of the Minister's campaign by the number of press releases that it has generated, it has surely been a major achievement. Every few months one Minister or another launches a "major" or the "biggest-ever" campaign to cut road casualties. I am the first to acknowledge the usefulness of publicity campaigns to keep an issue high in public consciousness. I welcome the Government's announcement in the autumn statement of a further £10 million for publicity over the next three years. However, if publicity campaigns are to be truly effectively, they have to be supported by practical measures and assistance to organisations involved in road safety.

[Ms. Joan Ruddock]

In that context, I am pleased that the Government took our advice and that of many other organisations and changed the transport supplementary grant to allow specific money to be earmarked for road safety. I welcome that change in the mechanism. However, as I shall point out later, I believe that the situation regarding local transport schemes is still far from satisfactory.

The Opposition are always willing to give credit where credit is due. As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) said last Friday, one of the most pleasing aspects of the Queen's Speech is the commitment to reduce the number of accidents and deaths on our roads. I also welcome the long overdue appearance in the Queen's Speech of the proposals in the North report to tackle dangerous and drunken driving; they are to be brought into legislative form. I acknowledge also the implementation of the recommendations of the Horne report, which will bring road safety improvements, in particular to pedestrians and to cyclists. We look forward eagerly to the opportunity to debate those measures in the House.

However, the Opposition would be failing in our duty if we were only to applaud and to go along with those measures without looking at the wider implications of transport as a whole. Small, piecemeal measures are a sign of a piecemeal transport policy—a policy which has little vision and little energy. It is what one would expect from a Government in their final term. It is what one would expect from a Government who are running out of steam and are in disarray. Even the welcome extra money, which was announced in the autumn statement, is unlikely to bring about the radical improvement in the number of road casualties or, indeed, the significant improvement in transport for which the Minister is obviously hoping.

Sir Hal Miller: What are the Opposition's policies?

Ms. Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman asks what our policies are. I shall refer to policies that will be a real and radical alternative to those of the Government and which are clearly ours and have been published in our policy documents. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has read them. They have been frequently reiterated in the House.

The test of a policy lies in its results. I regret very much that the results do not show the improvement for which Transport Ministers have been striving over the past few years. Figures for the whole of 1989 and for the first half of 1990 show a steady and regrettable rise in the number of road deaths. Perhaps it is too soon to judge and perhaps the true comparison of figures does not take account of the long-term effects of publicity, but I fear that the Minister's aim of cutting casualty rates by one third remains an elusive target. I hope that the Minister will agree that the disappointing figures demonstrate that more needs to be done and done more urgently.

I remind the Minister that every road death costs about £630,000, according to his Department's own figures. The British Medical Association estimates that in 1988 no less than £4,000 million was spent on medical and ambulance services treating the victims of road accidents. I do not want to appear churlish and I do not want to re-run last year's debate, but many of the demands that were made on both sides of the House at that time have not been met in the intervening months. I shall highlight two issues, to one of which I am delighted to say the Minister has responded positively.

The arguments for bringing in the measures that I shall highlight—random breath testing and compulsory rear seat belts—were made by me in the debate last year and by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East last Friday in the debate on the Loyal Address. The measures are supported by a wide range of safety organisations, including the British Medical Association and PACTS—the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety. Despite what the Minister said this morning, the case for random breath testing remains extremely strong. I was interested to see that, according to a recent report by the transport and road research laboratory on public attitudes towards various road safety measures, 77 per cent. of those interviewed supported random breath testing.

Drinking and driving, as the Minister acknowledges, is the single main cause of death and injury on our roads. The BMA estimates that more than 25,000 casualties each year are directly attributable to alcohol. Evidence shows that the deterrent effect of random breath testing would be significant in reducing the number of drink-drivers. We have made a firm policy commitment to introduce random breath testing when we are in government.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The hon. Lady talks about the evidence. Again, we shall debate this matter at great length when the Bill comes forward, but has she received from the BMA or from anybody else any evidence that any other country has a lower level of drink driving than Britain? Has she any evidence that any other country has reduced drink driving as fast as we have over the past 10 years? To list the people who believe something is no substitute for actually producing the evidence which I should like to consider.

Ms. Ruddock: No one would seek to understimate or undermine the enormous success in respect of drink driving in this country, but, as the Minister acknowledged today, being the best in certain matters is not sufficient. My argument and that of those who believe that random breath testing is a deterrent is that it would further improve on the good results that we have had to date. We are talking about how to make a further improvement. The evidence is that that measure would produce that further improvement.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The hon. Lady cannot have it both ways—either there is evidence or there is not. I have been searching for it——

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Harold Walker): Order. Is the hon. Lady giving way?

Ms. Ruddock: No, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have dealt with the hon. Gentleman's question.

The Minister referred to this issue as though random breath testing were synonymous with the police stopping people at will. We do not support the unfettered right of the police to stop people at will, and the analogy of the sus law is not appropriate. We would introduce a policy under which there would be roadside check points, and a random sample of drivers would be stopped and tested. That is the way in which we can monitor that the tests are being done in a specific and random way without an infringement of

civil liberties. I still hope that the Government will support that measure in due course. Again, we shall be able to debate that matter further.

The other measure to which I referred at length last year and turn again now is the introduction of the compulsory wearing of seat belts. The case for that remains convincing. The measure would reduce rear seat casualties, of which there were 23,000 in 1988, by 70 per cent. It would also reduce front seat casualties. As the Minister said, it is supported by 82 per cent. of those who were polled recently. I am therefore delighted with the Minister's announcement this morning. However, I wonder whether there is a need for a consultation process, because the evidence seems clear that there is already a real consensus. I think that the Minister should go ahead without further ado, but let us not quibble on that point because he has made that commitment and I welcome it.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for what she said, but does she accept that the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety has recognised the need and the desirability of consulting on this matter before implementing any new regulations?

Ms. Ruddock: I am more than happy to welcome that.

In last year's debate, I called for road safety to become part of the national curriculum. As has been said, there is a tremendous difference in the attitudes taken by different schools. Some schools place high emphasis on teaching children about road safety, but others do not. We believe that road safety should be part of the national curriculum. I am sad to learn that the Department of Transport-Department of Education and Science working party that has been considering this issue has still failed to come up with any recommendations. Given the increase in child casualty rates in 1989, this matter is now a pressing priority.

However, I welcome the measures that the Minister has announced in relation to children and young people. I welcome especially his attitude towards the measures relating to motor cyclists, whom we acknowledge are one of the most vulnerable groups of road users. Sadly, however, none of that excuses the Government's failure to develop a coherent and co-ordinated transport policy. It is not for lack of being asked to do so, because organisations as disparate as the Confederation of British Industry, the City of London, the local authorities associations, the English tourist board and many others have called for that, as have many of the Minister's hon. Friends. We all want a strategic plan to try to solve some of the country's appalling problems.

Another year has passed without effective action being taken. Congestion continue to increase, especially in London and the south-east. Our rail, bus and tube networks continue to buckle under the strain. Passengers continue to face delays, cancellations and high fares on public transport while motorists face traffic jams and long delays. We all suffer the environmental consequences of that chaos.

The Minister made much today—and has done so in a number of speeches—of the need to encourage cyclists. We very much endorse that strategy. Encouraging cyclists and encouraging people to walk as much as possible are essential parts of any future transport policy. However, it is impossible to make the position amenable to cyclists and pedestrians without a comprehensive transport policy. We cannot simply tell cyclists—although I would do this also—that they should wear helmets and that they should take as much responsibility as possible for their own safety, and then tell them that local authorities cannot afford to institute cycle routes and will not do so. We need to ensure that there is a safe space in which cyclists can travel. That requires an integrated and comprehensive transport policy.

Mr. Harry Greenway: It is dangerous to speak like that to suggest that simply because we do not have an integrated policy for cyclists—I, too, would welcome that—a helmet is less important for cyclists. If that is what the hon. Lady is implying, she is wrong and I hope that she will recognise that.

Ms. Ruddock: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not think that that is what I meant. I said that I support the Minister and all other hon. Members who have called for personal responsibility and for the wearing of cycle helmets. I endorse that absolutely and enthusiastically. However, if one is wearing a cycle helmet but does not have a safe space in which to cycle, one is just as likely to have an accident as if a helmet was not worn. Although a cyclist may save his head, he may still be injured. Every cycling organisation in the country believes that there should be a safe road space devoted to cyclists. The hon. Gentleman, like myself, represents a London constituency and I am sure that he understands the need for a strategic network throughout the city, but that can be devised only if we have a strategic authority to oversee it.

I turn now to some of the wider aspects of road transport. The Minister defined road safety as "casualty reduction". However, we are bound to take account of the wider impact of road traffic on our communities. The environment and people's health are now directly jeopardised by the increase in traffic on our roads. I recently visited Norwich, which is a fine city in which one would imagine that things are still operating reasonably well and that the environment is still acceptable, and even there an air survey taken on the morning I arrived found a dangerous level of air pollution which was jeopardising people's health. In London, we are well used to that. We are constantly told that the levels of air pollution exceed the limits of the World Health Organisation and that they arise directly from road traffic. Although there are regular reports and studies, the Government fail to act. We know—the Minister knows—that traffic is continuing to grow in London and that the number of vehicles coming into the city is constantly increasing.

I must take the Minister to task for a measure that he did not mention this morning. It is an example of the Government demonstrating their schizophrenia on this issue. I am referring to the forthcoming legislation on red routes. The Government say that their purpose is to increase the traffic flow in central London. In fact, the measure is more likely to increase the volume of traffic and to cause greater congestion and greater air pollution. It is hard to believe that the Government still refuse to acknowledge that we need restraint not encouragement of road traffic. London's traffic problems will never be solved by encouraging private and company motorists to make greater use of our roads.

Mr. Spearing: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not only a question of air, but of road accidents? Is she aware that the east London river crossing, which is to have a

[Mr. Spearing]

six-lane motorway route into parts of east London, is being built without any extension being provided to the docklands light railway, which would carry large numbers of people by public transport? Although I am not opposed to that crossing—it was in the Abercrombie plan of 1943—I am opposed to it without the inclusion of public transport across the link because without that it will encourage the generation of traffic in London rather than providing the proper balance to which the Government are now notionally committed.

Ms. Ruddock: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point and demonstrates that there is no rationale for building more road space unless the Government are also committed to making that road space usable primarily by public transport and, as my hon. Friend suggests, to providing a link between any road network and the public transport system or an extension of the public transport system.

The Minister correctly drew attention to the vital role of local authorities in reducing road casualties and improving road safety. I commended him earlier on changing the transport supplementary grant mechanism, but, if local authorities are to make a real contribution to the Minister's target, more resources must be provided. Some local safety schemes are relatively inexpensive to implement and show a quick rate of return. Sometimes simply changing a junction or improving road markings can make a great difference.

However, local authorities are increasingly having to look at whole areas if they are to avoid displacing road traffic from one street into another. Area studies are needed and we also need traffic-calming and other measures to protect residential streets and our children and pedestrians, and to direct through traffic along the most acceptable routes. Such schemes were commended by the Minister and they are not cheap. My borough of Lewisham is a case in point. Partly because of the success of Government publicity and partly because of people's growing concern about the environment, more and more residents are asking councils to do something about the danger on our roads.

Last year I spoke about Gellatley road in my constituency. That is a residential road used by 16,000 vehicles a day. That presents immense danger and the road has a proven accident rate. The local authority wishes to undertake another study in the Ladywell area. The implementation of measures for that tiny area of four or five roads in my constituency would cost about £70,000. That is a small sum, but it is the entire budget for all the traffic management schemes allowed in the borough. That is nonsense. Clearly, there is a shortage of funds for local authorities to deal with essential safety work. The local authority associations, in conjunction with PACTS, underlined that message when they estimated that a further £30 million would be needed this year to enable local authorities to play their part in reducing casualties.

There is another problem. I understand that cycling and safety schemes on non-designated roads will attract Government grant from next year, but that traffic-calming schemes will not necessarily do so. Councils are, therefore, hindered in implementing traffic-calming schemes on non-designated roads which, in the main, are the ones for which they seek aid and cannot get it. The Minister should look again at the conditions of grant to see whether it can be extended to cover all roads and all types of traffic calming. I am sure he will agree that traffic-calming measures have a positive effect on road safety. Councils need more money to enable them to introduce more schemes and Lewisham council is an example.

I draw the Minister's attention to a major obstacle to road safety which I know that he acknowledges. The question of reducing speed limits has been raised in the House before and I was delighted at the support given to a suggestion to reduce the limit to 20 mph in some urban areas. The evidence shows that we should look more widely at the issue. There is definite correlation between speed and accidents. Of course, emissions from vehicles travelling at high speed are now known to have environmental consequences. I endorse what the Minister said, but I should like to know more about what he intends to do other than merely meeting advertising associations. Advertisers continue to promote their products according to speed and vie with each other using such slogans as, "It doesn't take a test pilot's licence to take this car flying." and "It is capable of 150 mph so why did it take six years to get here?"

Given such slogans, how can we believe that the motor industry is serious about promoting notions of road safety? The industry encourages people to break the law. At the recent British international motor show, cars that could reach 170 mph were on display. Why are such cars being produced and promoted as being able to reach that speed if manufacturers are not tempting people to try them out and drive them at that speed. We applaud the efforts of car manufacturers to improve vehicle design, but safety still takes second place to speed in the message to sell cars.

I have attempted to range fairly widely, because it is clear that we cannot separate road safety from the fundamental debate about how to plan the nation's overall need to transport people and goods. The Department of Transport continues to predict that by 2025 there will be an increase of 100 per cent. or more in the number of vehicles on our roads. However, implementing the whole roads programme which Ministers constantly applaud would increase capacity by only 2 per cent.

The consequence of the Government's laissez-faire attitude will be a massive increase in congestion. Tragically, it will be impossible to reach the target of reductions in casualty rates that the Government have set. We support and welcome much of what the Government are doing to reduce casualties and improve road safety. However, that is no substitute for a strategic plan for an integrated transport policy that gives priority to an efficient, environmentally friendly and affordable public transport system. Public transport remains and has the potential to be the safest form of movement available to our people, and it is the best way to safeguard our environment and our neighbourhoods.

10.56 am

Sir Anthony Grant (Cambridgeshire, South-West): In spite of her customary great charm, the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) did not contribute enormously to the debate. Apart from the ritual party political mumbo-jumbo and vague waffle about co-ordination and planning of public transport, she agreed with almost everything said by my hon. Friend the Minister. We should be thankful for that. I strongly agree

with my hon. Friend the Minister and praise what he and his Department are doing. I should declare an interest because I have the honour to be the president of the Guild of Experienced Motorists which represents about 50,000 of Britain's private motorists.

Not long ago I was talking to our late and much lamented friend Ian Gow. I said, "Looking back on your political life what is it that gives you cause for the most shame?" He said, "It is the fact that we now have double figure inflation." I told him that my greatest shame was that in 25 years in Parliament under successive Governments each year we still see on our roads the slaughter of more than 5,000 people and the injury of 300,000. That is a national shame. The 300,000 people who are injured have not all just had a bump or a knock, because the figure includes people who are ruined for life. Many families are also ruined. Many people are reduced to cabbages and others lose limbs. It is a serious matter. It works out at 500 people in an average constituency each year. People stand 10 times as much chance of being killed on the roads as they do of being killed through murder or manslaughter. The figures are disgraceful and the nation should be ashamed of them.

I am pleased that the Minister and his Department have succeeded in giving a much higher profile to this immensely important and tragic subject. The equivalent of a Lockerbie disaster happens every three weeks on our roads and the equivalent of a football stadium disaster happens every fortnight. If the media would give to our roads the attention that they give to other matters there would be much greater public awareness. In that sense I am entirely in favour of the policies announced by the Minister to raise public awareness.

In May I drew attention to the fact that I think that the roads in Cambridgeshire have the worst safety record in Britain. Certainly, East Anglia as a whole has the worst record. That is a disgrace. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Minister has announced that the region is to receive 20 per cent. of the £3 billion budget that has been earmarked for road improvement. I am sure that everyone in my constituency will be grateful for that.

The North report is an important and detailed document on road safety. I am delighted that the Government have embarked—not before time—on the task of implementing some of the recommendations that are set out in it. I am sure that we all look forward to the introduction of the implementing Bill.

I was glad to hear the Minister's announcement on seat belts. I have always advocated their use. I think that events have proved that those of us who supported their introduction and use were right. I am concerned that my hon. Friend did not refer to lorries and heavy goods vehicles generally in this context. I am appalled when I see a heavy goods vehicle in which young children are sitting beside the driver, possibly with a lady with a small baby, and there is no sign of anyone wearing seat belts.

Mr. Roger King: And speaking on the telephone.

Sir Anthony Grant: Indeed. It is disgraceful that there is no requirement that seat belts should be worn in heavy goods vehicles. I hope that the Department of Transport will consider the use of seat belts by children and others who ride in heavy goods vehicles.

I tiptoe delicately into the subject of drinking and driving. I know that the beady eyes of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) are just behind me. I am sure that we all pay tribute to the remarkable contribution that he made on this and other issues when he was in office.

I am not wholly convinced by the opposition to random breath tests. When such tests were introduced in New South Wales, Australia, there was a 35 per cent. reduction in prosecutions. The Guild of Experienced Motorists conducted a poll among its members and, as I recall the outcome, 80 per cent. were in favour of something of the nature of random breath tests. The 80 per cent. may have been right or wrong, but I do not think that we can dismiss the concept lightly.

Drinking and driving is immensely dangerous—so much so that many people, perhaps, should give up driving and stick to drinking. It is gratifying that there has been a reduction in the incidence of drinking and driving, thanks to the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham.

We must note however, that four out of five accidents are not caused by drinking. Let us not be obsessed with the issue. Why are so many accidents unrelated to drinking? Undoubtedly, speed is a vital issue. Speed may not necessarily cause an accident, but when one takes place it will be infinitely worse and more damaging if excessive speed is involved. There is unanimity between the two Front Benches that it is ludicrous that motor car manufacturers should be advertising cars that have maximum speeds of 140, 150 and 170 mph. Some of these products are cheap cars that can be purchased by those who are incapable of driving them safely. These are cars which require the skill of Nigel Mansell to operate them safely. In an earlier age, we would have expected only Stirling Moss or Fangio, or others of that nature, to operate them. It is absurd that such cars should be made available on a large scale because there is no place where they can be driven at the speeds of which they are capable. It is absurd also that they should be positively advertised as being a good thing. I shall support wholeheartedly anything that my hon. Friend the Minister does in this respect. I am glad that the Opposition take the same view.

Mr. Alex Carlile: Will the hon. Gentleman join me in condemning especially the heavy publicity that has been given recently to a Vauxhall Carlton which is capable, apparently, of achieving 170 mph? It should not be available for public purchase, even at the outrageous price of, I think, £45,000.

Sir Anthony Grant: I entirely agree with the hon. and learned Gentleman. I would not, however, confine my criticism to the Vauxhall company. I could mention many other motor car manufacturers, but I shall not do so.

Mr. Roger King: I understand that General Motors and Vauxhall are not selling the 470 high-speed Carltons that will be available—they have been subjected to intense development by the General Motors Lotus subsidiary in this country, and will reap some export rewards as a result —without the purchasers and future users having gone through a test. If my memory serves me right, that is the position.

Sir Anthony Grant: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has led me to standards of driving. I am glad to know that some motor car manufacturers are taking the issue seriously. The standard of our driving tests is entirely inadequate for our modern roads and modern vehicles. I

[Sir Anthony Grant]

have always said that it is ridiculous that motorists can tootle around suburbs in a Mini, or whatever, at 30 mph, and then step into a Porsche, or what have you—they usually opt not for a Porsche or something of that sort but for a relatively cheap car—and belt down the motorway like maniacs. There is a need to raise the standard of driving so that we can ensure that motorists are qualified to drive the vehicles that they are able to purchase.

The Swiss and the Austrians, for example, are used to appalling weather conditions. They are appalled at the way in which British drivers operate in adverse road and weather conditions. They are accustomed to the difficulties that ensue, whereas we in Britain assume that the weather will always be mild and pleasant and the roads in a superb condition. The fact is that the weather and the roads are not always pleasant and superb and that most motorists are unqualified to drive on dangerous roads.

Ms. Ruddock: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that irrespective of how good a driver one may be, it is questionable whether anyone can drive well at 170 mph. Even if anyone can, the fact is that there is a speed limit which means that any car that is driven at such a speed will be driven illegally. It is important to stress that no one can drive legally on our roads at that speed.

Sir Anthony Grant: That is right. That is why I question the purpose of advertising vehicles that are capable of such a high speed. It would seem that such advertising has the effect of inviting people to exceed the speed limit.

There is a problem, because some high-speed cars are geared so highly and go so fast that it is jolly difficult to drive them slowly. I shall make a confession. many years ago I was cruising in my car and found that I was travelling at a speed which was disgracefully above the speed limit. I did not know that I was travelling so fast. That was a long time ago when I was younger and very foolish.

Mr. John P. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is extremely honest. Does he agree with me that it was irresponsible that an article that appeared recently in the *Sunday Correspondent*—it was written, of course, by that newspaper's transport correspondent—argued in favour of the motor car concerned because it could outpace a police car?

Sir Anthony Grant: I absolutely and utterly agree. I hope that the manufacturers are taking note of these remarks.

I have been led neatly and conveniently to the fact that an enormous number of road accidents are caused by those who are driving stolen cars. Those who steal cars nearly always end up in some sort of crash. They are irresponsible and they take the view that the vehicle does not belong to them anyway. Much more attention should be given to fitting in vehicles devices that prevent them from being stolen. Manufacturers should be encouraged to ensure that vehicles cannot be stolen as easily as at present. I hope that the courts will regard the stealing of vehicles as a much more serious matter. The courts tend to think, "This is the peccadillo of a young juvenile." It is not only an intolerable offence, but it can lead to serious accidents and death.

Many other hon. Members wish to speak, so I come to my two final points. I am pleased that the Minister mentioned the accursed business of people driving too close behind the vehicle in front. It is the cause not necessarily of major accidents, but of many minor accidents, particularly on our motorways. It is the wretched business of driving on the assumption that the car will stop as soon as the brakes are applied. It will not. Cars go on for a long distance. That is the cause of pile-ups.

The problem can be overcome easily by electronic means. It is perfectly possible to fit vehicles with devices that show that they are too close to the vehicle in front. I hope that the Minister will study the research and see whether it is possible to introduce some regulation to ensure that vehicles are fitted with such a device. It would save an enormous number of accidents and an enormous amount of nervousness and terror on our roads. I cannot count the number of times I have driven up the M11 followed by a vehicle within inches of me which could not possibly stop in time. Many elderly people in small cars must use that road, too. The heavy goods vehicles are the worst of all. It is a disgrace and a scandal how closely they drive behind other vehicles. That should be said loudly and clearly and I am glad that the Minister has taken it on board.

I should like the courts to make much greater use of disqualification. Disqualification for serious driving offences is not nearly sufficiently used. I should like the courts also to exercise powers, if they have them—the Minister will tell me whether they do—to confiscate vehicles. Nothing would be a greater deterrent than if a vehicle involved in a road traffic offence were confiscated. I do not care whether vehicles belong to companies and firms, as so many do. It would deter companies that supply vehicles from having irresponsible employees driving their vehicles. All too often, companies say, "Here is your company car. Here are the keys. Get on with it." Greater responsibility is called for from many companies in that respect.

After decades of pumping more and more cars on to the roads and of more and more deaths, with successive Governments little appreciating the consequences, I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has raised the profile of this issue in the Queen's Speech. I and, more importantly, the Guild of Experienced Motorists wish him every success.

11.12 am

Mr. Ken Eastham (Manchester, Blackley): I am grateful for being invited to join this important debate. I am a northern Member of Parliament and often we hoof it back to our constituencies on Fridays, but this is a special day for me. My local vicar, the Rev. Keith Butterworth, was invited this morning to open our proceedings with Prayers. Therefore, it is a special day for him, the House and me. I shall not miss this opportunity of making one or two worthwhile points about this important matter. Unlike the hon. Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant), I do not have to declare any interest in representing any guilds. I am simply attempting to represent my constituents who are extremely worried about these serious problems.

I am a motorist, so I am aware, as are all other hon. Members, of the many dangers that we encounter on our travels in towns and cities. Street lighting, which is one of the most important aspects of safety, has not yet been

touched on. Any motorist will notice the variations between high-quality lighting, poor lighting and, in some cases, no lighting. Great improvements have been made in the standards of street lighting but, unfortunately, in some towns it is still at the standard as it was 50 years ago. It should be greatly improved.

I am not trying to introduce a sour note, but, often, local authorities would like to improve street lighting but are prevented from doing so by cash limitations. If there are problems of poor and inadequate lighting, it is no good the Government occasionally exhorting local authorities to spend less. I have a little story to tell about that.

A few days ago, I was walking home from this House late at night with a colleague. He noticed that the main street by the side of the river was in darkness and remarked that it had been so for weeks. He mentioned it to the policeman who said that he would make inquiries. A day or two later, the policeman reported to my hon. Friend that the lighting had not been maintained because the local authority had run out of funds. That meant that a major road was in absolute darkness.

Street lighting affects not only vehicle safety, but personal physical safety vis à vis violence. I put down that marker not because I am whingeing, but because it is an important point that the Minister must face when he considers safety. A family who loses a husband or a dear child carries that tragedy with it for the rest of its life. Whether to maintain street lighting cannot be determined on money alone.

I applaud and commend the Minister for making a further reference to seat belts. Four or five years ago I stayed behind on a Friday when a Member attempted to introduce a Bill on seat belts. I was amazed at the hostility from the various organisations that resisted the Bill. The legislation has now been vindicated. Ministers tell us how greatly seat belts have benefited society. Even if we have never been involved in an accident, we have benefited because of the great savings to the National Health Service. We recall the many horrendous accidents resulting in people going through windscreens and spending many months in hospital sometimes never to return to work. Further measures on the introduction of seat belts would be applauded, as they are acknowledged to be financially beneficial to society as well as to health through the prevention of accidents.

I am extremely uncomfortable when I drive across a level crossing. One may talk about demanning and reductions in manpower, but I am sure that we have all seen photographs of the most horrendous accidents when cars are smashed into by trains at unmanned level crossings. I do not believe that it would be a wise policy to increase the number of self-controlled level crossings at junctions where motorists may be caught unawares, with horrendous consequences.

I emphasise to the Minister that there should be extensive determination throughout the country to introduce improved street lighting of a proper standard. Never mind about cost controls and limits, street lighting is one expense we cannot afford to cut.

I applaud the Minister on his further proposals about seat belts. My final rider is my concern about unmanned level crossings. For goodness sake, let us think carefully before we increase the number of such crossings.

11.21 am

Sir Hal Miller (Bromsgrove): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Eastham), who emphasised that street lighting is an important contribution to improved safety, even though it is unpopular in some suburban and rural areas on account of the disturbance it may cause.

I welcome the opportunity to take part in this important debate although, as a cyclist, the suggestion that I might be inconspicuous struck me as rather odd. Obviously I shall have to pay greater attention to the need to make myself more conspicuous and I welcome the opportunity to do so this morning.

I want to restore some balance to our discussion, which has revealed that there is a clear difference in approach between those on the Labour and Conservative Benches. The Opposition Front Bench spokesman has enticed me to make a challenge. The hon. Lady seems to regret the fact that, because of much increased economic activity, we are now suffering congestion on our roads. I hope that she is not suggesting that we should return to Labour policies to reduce our economic activity in order to enable our transport system to cope adequately. That appeared to be the implication behind some of her remarks about returning people to public transport as a preferred means of travel. She appears to ignore the 30 million people who have driving licences and the 22 million cars on our roads, 20 million of which are licensed.

Ms. Ruddock: I am sorry to have enticed the hon. Gentleman into this debate. Does he acknowledge that there is even greater economic activity in some of our competitor countries, including, for example, Germany, where the level of car ownership is much higher than in Britain? None the less, the German Government have pursued policies to create a better public transport system and the people use their cars less and public transport more as a result.

Sir Hal Miller: Yes, but in Germany better preparations were made earlier to build the roads to provide the increased mobility that increased economic activity requires.

The hon. Lady viewed with disquiet, if not distaste, the idea that there might be a further increase in car ownership in this country. The hon. Lady should note that it is still the ambition of many people to take advantage of the increased personal mobility and the opportunities for education, vacations and undertaking family responsibilities that car ownership presents.

I want to tackle the Minister——

Ms. Ruddock: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Hal Miller: I am trying to tackle the Minister and I do not believe we should have a private debate.

Ms. Ruddock: But the hon. Gentleman is tackling me and I want to put the record straight. We do not object to an increase in car ownership. I gave the Department of Transport figures for the increase in the number of vehicles on our roads, which anticipate that car use will increase by 100 per cent. at least, but the Government's road building programme puts the increase in road capacity at 2 per cent. There is no way in which one can sustain that increase in car use without further disastrous problems, including, for example, an increase in accidents.

Sir Hal Miller: We are not talking about Dinky cars that we want to own and put in a show case. Of course people want to use their cars—95 per cent. of all personal movement takes place on the roads and 77 per cent. of that movement is by passenger car.

In the unfortunate temporary absence of my hon. Friend the Minister I should like to tackle him on the difference in the number of cars and the number of cars that are licensed. One of the best ways to improve safety as well as the environment—my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West (Sir A. Grant) also mentioned this—would be to get rid of unlicensed cars or those whose licences are not up to date. Many of those cars may have been stolen and they are a hazard to cyclists and pedestrians in particular, as some are left on pavements. If we could get rid of such cars it would be a major contribution to improved safety and it would also mean that tax revenue would no longer be lost. We should have a much more effective blitz on unlicensed cars.

The tenor of this debate, in which the Lotus Carlton has been taken as the reductio ad absurdum, has ignored the fact that modern cars are built to a much higher safety standard than before. The brakes, the engine management, the shock absorbers, the lights and seat belts have all led to such improvements in safety. I agree with the hon. Member for Blackley that there is a gap in our safety precautions because rear seat belts are compulsory only in cars built after a certain date, which means that the occupants of older cars are left unprotected. We would do much better to offer an inducement to people to get rid of their older cars so that better safety and better protection for car occupants is achieved. If we got rid of such cars we should also be able to reach far higher standards on vehicle emissions.

I do not go along with the Labour party approach of increased regulation and increased police activity. The hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) gave me cause to wonder as she talked about random breath tests and greater police activity. Usually she decries increased police activity and opposes their attempts to preserve public order on the streets. There is a real philosophical divide between us. My hon. Friends and I much prefer to use education, in which the Opposition have suddenly discovered an interest, and training, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West rightly referred, due to his experience as a member of the Guild of Experienced Motorists. We prefer to use technology and the market system. I suggest that the market ought to be given the signal that safer as well as environmentally preferable vehicles should be manufactured. The market mechanism could be used, in particular by the manipulation or adjustment of the special car tax for certain categories of vehicles.

I follow up the market side of the argument by referring to the role that insurance companies could play by introducing premiums for different classes of drivers—those with different experience and qualifications—and for differently equipped vehicles. Some of the newer vehicles, with anti-lock braking or traction control systems and, in the case of commercial vehicles, no balancing braking systems, are much safer and much more advanced. There is no direct correlation between sheer speed and braking capacity. Many older cars that are capable only of reaching comparatively minor speed levels are more unsafe. I listened with great care and much admiration to the Minister's speech because of the target that he has set for himself. It was set originally by the former Minister for Roads and Traffic, my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), as I think he now describes it, although I believe that I canvassed for him in Welling.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: No, it was not.

Sir Hal Miller: All of us owe my hon. Friend a great debt. I am happy to associate my friends in the motor industry with the tributes that deservedly have been paid to him. I recall with great pleasure the fact that he received the Castrol gold award for his contribution to road safety.

One has to remind oneself that life is full of paradox. When the Minister served in local government in Wandsworth he was the apostle of the market and free enterprise. Now that he has assumed the heavy burdens of office, on which I congratulate him most warmly, he talks about more regulation and more legislation. He seems to have forgotten some of the market signals and education proposals to which I am trying to draw him back.

I wish also to draw my hon. Friend's attention to the use of technology. I remind him that I had the pleasure of accompanying my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) and for Meriden (Mr. Mills) earlier this week to see the Secretary of State for Transport, when we discussed the tragic accident on the M42. We suggested to him that more could have been done to prevent that accident if automatic cameras had been installed and linked to warning signals back down the M42. A similar installation is already in use on the A1-M1 at the Hatfield tunnel interchange. We do not see why they could not be introduced at interchanges such as that between the M42 and the A45 where the problems have been considerable over a long period because of the increasing use—the hon. Member for Deptford will be pleased to hear—being made of Birmingham international railway station and the national exhibition centre.

Technology should also be applied to road lighting and prevention systems. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridgeshire, South-West that it should be applied both to speed and to the spacing of vehicles. I want the police to be freed from confrontation with the public and from their arduous duties. As we open more miles of road, we impose greater burdens upon the police, which some of them are having a hard time, because of manpower and finance constraints, to meet. They are put in a difficult position vis à vis the public. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Northfield is to speak later about the police presence at the scene of the M42 accident. We should be able to rely much more on automated methods of control. Speed is only one aspect of the problem. The speed limit ought to be more flexible so that it can cater for different conditions at different times. Automatic monitoring would provide us with the opportunity, which at the moment is denied to us, to bring that about. Moreover, the important question of spacing needs to be tackled.

Finally, I wish to redress slightly the balance of the debate. There has been much criticism today of motor manufacturers. My hon. Friends may not realise that great improvements have been made in the construction of vehicles and the standard of components. I am happy to be able to assure the Minister and the House that the motor industry, the manufacturers and the component makers

fully recognise their responsibilities in improving the environment, including exhaust emissions, noise and safety.

11.36 am

Mr. Alex Carlile (Montgomery): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, particularly as we heard a broad speech from the Minister for Roads and Traffic, who opened the debate. He showed plainly that he is interested in and wishes to listen to the views expressed on many issues.

I begin with a plea from the heart. As I was driving my car through the Members' Entrance this morning, I was involved in a minor accident with a cyclist. Fortunately, the cyclist was wearing a helmet and he was not injured. I do not believe that the accident was the fault of either of us. However, it highlighted the difficulties that are faced both by cyclists and motorists in busy parts of our great cities where inadequate provision is made for cycle lanes. That cyclist could quite easily have been seriously hurt in the accident. I support the calls that have been made by those hon. Members who cycle. I confess that I cycle only in the countryside, where my home is. I am not enthusiastic about cycling in London because of the dangers involved. I join those hon. Member in their call for better provision to be made for cycling routes.

I welcome what the Minister said about rear seat belts. It is so much easier to persuade people to wear seat belts in motor cars if it is made compulsory. I encourage those who travel in the back of my car to wear seat belts. My children were very reluctant and put up great resistance to wearing seat belts until they had to do so. Thereafter, there was no question about it; they quickly became accustomed to putting them on and keeping them on—and continuing to wriggle, even with their seat belts on.

I share the Minister's misgivings—this is a personal view, not the view of my party—about random breath tests. I believe that the police have all the powers that they need to breathalyse people. They have wide powers to stop motorists. If the police stop a motorist, using their powers, and find that they have reasonable grounds for suspecting that the motorist may have alcohol in his body, they can breathalyse him. There is no difficulty about that. The statistics show that the police have had considerable success.

The use of random breath tests seems to identify the wrong issue. I am concerned that 80 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood is still high for motorists. The message that we are trying to convey to motorists from all quarters in the House is that one should not drink and drive. In my view it would be far better if the level were pitched significantly lower, so that motorists knew that anything but the smallest drink would render them liable to disqualification from driving, and that the real message is, "If you are driving, drink soft drinks." I should like the blood alcohol level to be reduced to a maximum of 50 mg of alcohol per 100 ml of blood.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: The hon. and learned Gentleman makes a sensible point about safety, but I wonder whether he thinks that this is the right time to change the law. In practice, one is permitted to have up to the legal limit of alcohol in the blood. Above that limit there is nearly always an automatic conviction for a crime. Lowering the blood alcohol limit could discourage people from taking the sensible advice never to mix alcohol with driving. If we keep the limit at 80 mg per 100 ml, at least for the foreseeable future, people will thionk that that is the legal limit, rather than the safe limit, and will be more likely to take the advice not to have even one drink before driving.

Mr. Carlile: I am not sure that that is entirely logical. What is more, the likelihood of being acquitted of a breathalyser offence is now small. In my early days at the Bar, I frequently prosecuted and defended breathalyser cases—they were usually Friday cases—in the Crown court. It was common for sympathetic acquittals to be obtained. However, juries' views changed. Breathalyser cases have sensibly been taken out of the Crown court and put into the magistrates courts. I cannot imagine that there would be sympathetic acquittals in the magistrates courts, even if the level were reduced to 50 mg per 100 ml of blood. I expect that a reduction to 50 mg would reinforce the view put so forcefully by the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley).

It is a matter of regret to me that no Welsh Office Minister is present on the Government Front Bench today. No doubt Welsh Office Ministers will read the report of this debate with great care. I wish that I could speak with enthusiasm about the attention paid by the Welsh Office highways department—I do not criticise Ministers—to representations made to it about certain aspects of road safety on trunk roads which are distant from Cardiff. The Welsh Office highways department suffers from what I call the Wales-near-Cardiff syndrome. Sometimes it fails to recognise the problems on trunk roads in parts of Wales, some distance from Cardiff.

In rural Montgomeryshire, and in all rural areas of Wales, we have a high proportion of elderly people. Elderly road users, especially those living in villages with trunk roads that pass through them, face special problems.

I recently made representations to the Minister of State, Welsh Office, the hon. Member for Conwy (Sir. W. Roberts) that speed limits should be introduced on the trunk road which passes through the villages of Llanerfyl, Llangadfan and Foel. I know that road well. I have stood beside it for long periods with elderly constituents who have complained to me. Heavy goods vehicles have been mentioned. I have seen articulated lorries thundering through those villages at speeds far in excess of 60 mph.

I have been driving for 25 years. I drive great distances, and I can recognise a car travelling at 90 mph when I see one. I have seen cars travelling through those villages at speeds of up to and over 90 mph.

I received a most extraordinary reply to my letter from the Minister of State. He suggested that the introduction of a speed limit in those villages might put drivers' speeds up. I simply do not understand the logic of that.

I understand that the police are reluctant about having yet more speed limits in vast rural police areas, which they have difficulty policing to the full. That is understandable, but public safety surely demands that, in villages with an increasing proportion of elderly people, in which there have been accidents and where there is evidence of danger, it makes sense to introduce speed limits of 30 or 40 mph even if all it achieves is to slow down the odd articulated lorry.

The same could be said of the Welsh Office's attitude to pedestrian crossings. In Newtown, there has long been a campaign for a pedestrian crossing across the trunk road, known locally as the Llanidloes road. A week or so ago, there was a serious accident on that road, and yet we still

[Mr. Carlile]

face resistence to the introduction of a pedestrian crossing near to a point where many schoolchildren cross the road on their way to and from the local high school from large housing estates.

I should like the Welsh Office highways department to display more flexibility—under the influence of the Minister's Department—towards speed limits and pedestrian crossings. Lollipop or road crossing patrols are an associated subject. Largely because of local government expenditure levels—I do not wish to talk about that, as it is too political for today's debate—lollipop controls have been withdrawn in rural mid-Wales. Some still exist because they are funded by community councils, but such councils have limited funding. If they pay a lollipop man or lady, that bleeds them of a considerable proportion of funds, which they cannot afford.

Part of the education budget, decided at Government level, should include a realistic allowance for school crossing patrols. Every week we hear of young children, or even teenagers, who are injured or killed as they cross the road to school. That would be obviated by the discipline that the school lollipop person brings. Lollipop men and ladies have made a contribution to young people's education, because they are often fairly strict disciplinarians, within their limited purview, and they teach children an element of road safety more cheaply than it can be taught in schools.

I am 100 per cent. in favour of the measures that are being introduced to compel all motor cyclists to have basic training. However, some considerable time ago a Government spokesman stated that those measures would not be introduced until they could be enforced universally. At the moment that cannot happen because rural areas are disadvantaged. I know that the Minister has received representations on this matter and I merely re-emphasise them. People who live in rural areas will find it extremely difficult and expensive to obtain basic training. Evidence shows that the Department of Transport is removing, rather than adding to, facilities in rural areas—an example in my constituency is the indefensible removal of the Machynlleth driving test centre.

I invite the Minister and his colleagues in the Welsh Office to consider carefully the provision of adequate basic motor cycle training facilities in rural areas, including rural Wales. It is a fact that a higher proportion of young people in rural areas use motor cycles, especially small ones. My 17-year-old daughter has a moped. It is almost necessary for her if she is to get around an area in which there is no public transport. The alternative is for parents, if they are there—unlike Members of Parliament—to act as taxi drivers at extraordinary hours of the day and night, young people being what they are. There is a particular need for training of young motor cyclists in rural areas. It is fair to say that most of the dealers are extremely careful about ensuring that those who buy mopeds can ride them reasonably safely, but many of these young people do not go to dealers to buy their first moped. They buy them for £50 or £75 from some other young person who is moving up to a 125 cc motor cycle and then they do not have the necessary training.

Debates such as this, carried out in as apolitical a spirit as possible, enable us to make progress on an important issue. I look forward to a favourable, or at least hopeful, response by the Ministerr on some of the issues that I have raised.

11.51 am

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I, too, welcome this annual debate on road safety. I particularly welcome the measures announced in the Queen's Speech which will contribute to road safety. Implementation of the recommendations in the Horne report for the more efficient management and co-ordination of street works to keep obstacles and other restrictions to traffic flow to a minimum, for which my borough council has been calling, must be in the interests of road safety.

Private sector investment in the building and operation of new roads, including new motorways, will also be in the interests of road safety. Anyone who has driven across France will appreciate that. One has a choice there between existing national routes, usually highly congested, and the fast, safe péage autoroutes. That is a choice to which I look forward in this country, although I fully appreciate that the opportunities open to us here are more limited because Britain is just one third the size of France. A glance at the motorway map of England and Wales shows that our most heavily populated areas in the south of England are nowhere near as well served by inter-urban motorways in the north-east and north-west. I look forward to the private sector being allowed to put that right.

I also welcome the announcement earlier this year by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport that we will proceed with the missing link in the M3 to the south coast ports and resorts to replace the pre-war Winchester bypass, with its atrocious record of traffic jams and accidents. Now that the last public inquiry is over and the last appeal has been turned down, I hope that we can proceed with all possible speed. I look forward to my hon. Friend the Minister for Roads and Traffic—the hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Chope)—confirming that that will happen.

I wish to put two particular points on road safety to the House. They both arise from experience of the same road in my constituency—one with which many hon. Members will be familiar, especially my Conservative colleagues who attended our party conference in Bournemouth last month. They might recall that, in heading for the town centre of Bournemouth, they would have driven over the so-called Cooper Dene flyover as soon as they passed the borough boundary on the A338 Ringwood spur road. It is, in effect, the main gateway to Bournemouth and the rest of Dorset.

Tragically, on 20 July 1988, during the construction of this flyover, a worker was killed by a reversing truck. His death could have been avoided if that truck had had an automatic, audible, reversing alarm fitted—a bleeper; and so might the 140 other deaths, the 603 serious injuries and the 1,774 slight injuries, totalling no fewer than 2,517 accidents since 1980, involving reversing heavy goods vehicles. In 1980, there were eight such deaths; in 1989, there were 20. No one can ignore that trend. Unfortunately, those figures are not serious enough for the Department of Transport to consider making reversing bleepers compulsory, as they are for trucks in other EC

countries. I strongly urge my hon. Friend the Minister to give new thought to this situation in the light of those statistics.

My second point concerns a cattle and farm crossing close to the same flyover in my constituency. I am sure that the House will agree that such crossings and dual carriageways carrying fast-moving traffic under virtual motorway conditions are utterly incompatible and can hardly be in the best interests of road safety; yet this is precisely the situation about a quarter of a mile from the very same flyover where traffic will undoubtedly be accelerating either to climb it or in coming off it. This traffic is then required to come to a halt when cattle or farm vehicles are crossing or if flashing red lights indicate that they are about to do so.

This is allowed for by the highways authority, Dorset county council, despite my objections before the flyover was constructed and those since by Bournemouth borough council in response to accidents that have occurred. On this occasion, I believe that the county council has acted, uncharacteristically, irresponsibly and with great short-sightedness in failing to build an appropriate overbridge or underpass at the same time as the flyover was constructed.

Indeed, the farmers concerned, my constituents at Holdenhurst farm and Manor farm, are obliged to cross from one to the other daily, as they have done for more than 20 years. Moreover, in May and June, when they commence silage making, they need to cross the dual carriageway up to 80 times a day with two teams of tractors and trailers. Obviously, they take their lives into their hands, as do the motorists who ignore the flashing red lights urging them to stop. Needless to say, the lights have been subject to frequent vandalism. I suspect that those of my constituents who run these farms act more responsibly than they want to in not taking cattle across as frequently as they would wish, in which case it is totally wrong for the county council to deny them their livelihood in this way. When they staged a French farmers' style demonstration last year—a photograph of which appeared on the back page of *The Times*—by blocking the road with tractors to make their point about the dangers of such a situation, traffic stretched back for miles. An additional factor is the nearby location of the new Royal Bournemouth hospital, the second phase of which will include a major accident unit. It can only be a matter of time before a fast-moving ambulance dealing with an emergency is required to halt for a tractor team.

I hope that I have said enough for my hon. Friend to share my concern for safety on one of the fastest roads in our county and I also hope that he will inquire into it. His predecessor but one was content to leave the matter to the county council, so I am glad to have had the opportunity today to raise this matter in the House.

11.59 am

Mr. John P. Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): I, too, am grateful for the opportunity to address the House on the important topic of road safety.

The road safety record of this country and of this Government is good compared with that of the rest of Europe, but if is still utterly unacceptable. In this country, more people die on the roads than in accidents in the home or in the workplace, through fires, through drowning or from acts of violence, including murder and terrorism. Five times as many people in this country die every year as a result of road accidents as died in the Falklands war. Many people are rightly concerned that if there were a military engagement in the middle east there would be considerable loss of life, but many of us find it hard to believe that similar consideration is not given to the 5,000 people who die and to the 300,000 people who are injured on our roads.

Road safety is a particular problem for children and for young people. The most common cause of death for children and for people up to the age of 30 is not, as one might think, one of the major diseases with which we still have to cope, but fatal accidents on the road. That is why it is important that today we have the opportunity to consider the topic.

The cost to the country has been estimated to be £6 billion. From the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) this morning about medical costs alone, that figure appears to be conservative, to say the least. If my hon. Friend's figures are accurate, the cost would be about £8 million per constituency, so hon. Members can consider the problem in terms of the loss to their own people.

One cannot, of course, calculate the human misery caused by death and disability from road accidents. Hon. Members may find it hard to believe, but every minute during this debate a person will be killed, maimed, disabled for life or otherwise injured on our roads. We should bear that in mind throughout the debate.

The Minister rightly pointed out this morning that 95 per cent. of road accidents, unlike accidents at work, are caused through human error, such as lack of judgment, carelessness, drink-driving and speeding. He seemed to conclude that that made it far more difficult to resolve the problems and to reduce the casualty rate on our roads. I beg to differ. A body of knowledge has been built up over the past 15 or 20 years by our own research establishments, by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, by the World Health Organisation and by others which tells us that we can tackle the problems. The fact that the Government have set themselves the laudable target of reducing the road casualty rate by one third by the year 2000 emphasises that point. Despite the fact that the primary cause of road accidents is human error, we can do a lot to effect a further great reduction in the toll of deaths and carnage on our roads.

I am one co-chairman of the all-party parliamentary advisory council for transport safety and the other is the hon. Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) who unfortunately, is unable to attend today because of a long-standing prior constituency engagement. We should like to put on record our thanks to the Government and to local authorities for their actions on road safety over the years. However, we are bold enough to suggest that there are some important further steps that the Government should contemplate so that they can achieve the standard that they have set themselves for 2000.

One important step is education in our schools. The provision of road safety education varies dramatically, there are no set guidelines and there is no universal provision, although I recognise that there may be different needs in different areas and that variation is needed. However, as I said earlier, in some schools, there is no safety education and, as our children are the most likely victims of road accidents, that is unacceptable.

Our second proposal to help to achieve the Government's own standard is new measures to control

[Mr. John P. Smith]

drinking and driving, and excessive speed. I am pleased to see that some proposals on that were covered—at least in part—in the Gracious Speech. We also want more resources to be allocated to the implementation of small highway engineering and traffic management schemes to contribute to accident reduction, improvements in vehicle safety standards and in the use of protective equipment and, last but not least, improvements in enforcement and the introduction of technological aids to assist traffic law enforcement. Again, those matters have been laudably covered—in part—in the Gracious Speech.

I had intended to cover three areas which I had chosen because they are the most cost effective, some of the easiest to implement and will have the most dramatic effects. However, I am delighted to say that I have had to reconsider one of the proposals because the Minister announced this morning his intention to go out to consultation on the introduction of regulations for the compulsory wearing of rear seat belts by adults. My organisation, the House and the country will have been grateful to hear that because we know that such a move will have an immediate and dramatic effect. Within the first year, it would save 80 lives and up to 4,000 injuries. The introduction of the compulsory wearing of front seat belts has been a great success. It has saved about 20,000 lives, and that is an achievement of which any Government could be proud. The measure introduced by the hon. Member for Cheadle to make seat belts compulsory for children under 14 has already saved the lives of and prevented serious injuries to at least 200 children. The new proposal is definitely a step in the right direction.

Some 23,000 people have been either killed or injured because they were adults who were unrestrained in the rear seat of a car, and it is good to attack that record. We sometimes forget the horrific injuries that can result from the failure to use rear seat belts—and some adults still do not use them even though they have been fitted in their cars. I must urge those who have rear seat belts to wear them now and not to wait for regulations. In a crash, an adult in a car travelling at average speed can be projected from the back seat with the force of a three and a half tonne truck. Often, the only obstacle in front of the passenger in the rear seat is the head of the passenger in the front seat. One can imagine the multiple head injuries that can be sustained in such an accident. The sooner the consultation is completed and the sooner regulations are brought before the House, the sooner we shall be able to start to prevent such accidents.

Random breath testing has been referred to today. We are disappointed that it was not covered in the Gracious Speech and that the Minister does not support it because it would be cost effective and easy to introduce. We know from the experiences of other countries that random breath testing works. It has been suggested today that there is no evidence to support the view that the introduction of random breath tests would greatly reduce casualties that occur as a result of drink-driving. That is simply not true.

The vast majority of national and international expert opinion believes that random breath testing will work, and the experience of New South Wales proves that it will. As the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) said, it has resulted in a 35 per cent. reduction in the number of casualties caused by drink-driving in that state. It is highly cost effective—so much so that savings have amounted to 20 times the cost to the police of introducing it. Sweden, which already had a good record, introduced severe penalties as a deterrent, but there was no dramatic effect until the introduction of random breath testing increased people's expectations of being caught. Punishment alone will not achieve our objective, although I welcome the proposals in the Gracious Speech for harsher penalties and new offences. We must make these wrongdoers—these criminals—realise that they will be caught.

We have the support of the police in this matter. Chief Constable Peter Joslin, the chairman of the Association of Chief Police Officers traffic committee, addressed a conference at Copenhagen this summer. He traced developments following the change of public attitude which has resulted in a welcome reduction in drink-driving and accidents due to it but said:

> "The attitude of Chief Constables has also changed and as a result of information gleaned from colleagues in the Australian State of New South Wales, it became clear . . . that not only could the public's attitude to this be changed and harnessed for the good, but a deterrent-based enforcement system was far more effective in reducing drink drive fatalities than was the traditional enforcement model."

We know that the police would like their rights to conduct breath tests to be unfettered, but there is a civil liberty argument and that is why random breath testing should be given a high profile and strictly controlled as it is elsewhere. It will be no less effective for that.

I shall not go into the other arguments about the success of random breath testing. Everyone except the Government seems to support it and, in the Government, the Secretary of State for Transport is a notable exception. Earlier in the year, it was widely reported in the press that he appeared to be very much in favour of random breath testing. I hope that he will use his considerable influence to make his Ministers and the Government support that view. Many of us are frankly astonished that the Government are not considering the introduction of random breath tests given that, in the first year, it could reduce the number of deaths by 300 and the number of serious injuries by 2,000. Apparently, 77 per cent. of the public support the measure and 70 per cent. believe that it would be effective. I urge the Minister to reconsider his position and put right the omission in the road traffic Bill.

The third measure that we think could be very effective in reducing injuries at a relatively low cost is the introduction of local safety engineering schemes by local authority highway departments. We appreciate the fact that the Government have now earmarked a proportion of the transport supplementary grant for allocation to local safety schemes, which may involve, for instance, a mini roundabout or road markings at a black spot. Such improvements may even be provided on an area-wide basis, and that can be most effective in reducing accidents, as can traffic-calming measures and the provision of refuge for pedestrians trying to cross the road. We know that such small common sense schemes can do the trick, but our local authority highway officers and safety experts do not have the resources at their disposal. The Government have said that 15 per cent. of their target reduction could be achieved by this method. I am glad that an element of grant is to be set aside but we recommend—along with all the motoring organisations, local authorities and professional institutions—that £30 million should be

allocated in the first year, or £120 million in the first three years. If the Government do not provide the necessary resources, they will not be able to achieve their target.

We have suggested a number of measures, one of which the Government have taken on board. I wrote to the Minister last week to say that I am delighted at the positive response that we have had. The introduction of those measures alone would prevent 4,000 deaths and serious injuries in the first year. It would save the country £250,000. If the Government take road safety seriously, they should seriously consider our proposals.

I calculate that, since I started my speech, about 22 people have been killed, maimed for life or otherwise injured on the roads. If for no other reason than that, the Government should consider our request.

12.19 pm

Mr. Iain Mills (Meriden): This is a most important debate. Hon. Members from both sides of the House have stated clearly the quite appalling statistics. When I recall those great days of battle when we fought to introduce the law on seat belts, it seems like a bad dream or a fantasy that people should have resisted so strongly a measure which has clearly been of great benefit.

I have always worn a seat belt because I thought it was sensible to do that. I suspect many motorists would agree with me when I say that I feel almost naked and very vulnerable without my seat belt on. Part of that is psychological and part of it is a result of my being involved in the campaign and having seen the statistics.

During my rallying and racing career I had many accidents and I can remember one that would certainly have prevented me entering this House had I not been wearing a full harness seat belt. Competition driving is one thing, but the dangers on our roads continue. Therefore, I take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on his move on rear seat belts. Most sensible people use them and we are urging people today to use them before regulations are completed. However, the proposal is an excellent step forward and most hon. Members would congratulate my hon. Friend the Minister on that.

I wish to refer to the design of cars and of motorways. Car design is very important. Having been involved for 20 years in engineering and marketing in the car industry, I have always found it difficult to sell safety. I understand that attitudes are changing. The raft of different perceptions of the environment and personal safety have meant that there are more opportunities for safety products. Over the years, technology has produced things like run-flat tyres and toughened glass. There is even a way of monitoring tyre pressure. However, all those things cost money. Most high-safety products involve complex technology, new materials or extra money.

The argument has always been that the decision-making process in buying a new car involves looking at its colour, the texture of the materials and the quality of the in-car stereo. In fact, at last year's motor show I heard a man who was intending to buy a car say, "But it's got only two on-board computers." I should have asked him whether he had looked at the tyres, the brakes and the other safety aspects. He was not basing his purchase decision on those aspects.

Many people decide to buy a car in response to advertising. To most people, whether one can do 170 mph in a car that is capable of that speed—although obviously not on public roads—is irrelevant. What matters is being able to boast to colleagues and friends that one has parked such a car outside. For some people, such a car is an extension of their macho image. They will never drive it at 170 mph; the important point is that their car is faster and more capable. That is extremely dangerous. Advertising can influence people whose ability to control those fast cars might be less than desirable.

I am not just talking about cars capable of 170 mph——

Mr. Roger King: Well, a test is involved with those.

Mr. Mills: That may be so. However, the emphasis on many models lies with the potency of the car's performance. Variants of quite humble cars such as the efi or turbo have achieved extraordinary marketing success. Modest cars are garnished to produce better performance, better styling and better looks. That is a reaction to market demand. I recognise the difficulty in persuading car manufacturers in a highly competitive market about safety features. Until people go into car show rooms and say, "Right, I know it's got a video, stereo and a radio, but what are the safety features? I want this, this and this", safety features will not be so important. There must be a role for Government publicity to encourage people to make the car industry market led instead of supply led.

Car theft is a serious problem. There is a car park in my constituency which serves Birmingham international airport, the railway station and the national exhibition centre. The thousands of cars there are a target for the organised teams who want to remove the in-car entertainment equipment and for the lads who want to steal a business man's BMW while he is away in London or in the NEC and then go burning up the A45 or the M42.

As an ex-engineer, I am appalled by the simplicity of car locking systems. It would be wrong of me to reveal the technique for breaking into cars, but it is well known that one can do in a couple of minutes all that one has to do to get into a car. It is not impossible once inside the car to bypass the steering lock and start the engine. Until manufacturers improve the design, cars will be stolen and driven badly and that will add to our road safety problems. However, I understand that there is pressure to have British standards for car locks with higher security standards.

Recently, there was a tragedy on the M42 in which a number of people died. My hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King), for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller) and I went to see the Secretary of State for Transport about it and he confirmed that the matter was important and that he would let us have a response as soon as possible. We hope that that response might appear today.

The M42 runs right through my constituency. I often enter the road at the top near where I live, I have access to the A45 and the areas around the NEC and I can then approach the Solihull turn-off and the A41 with access to the villages of Knowle and Dorridge and then to Hockley Heath. I know that motorway extremely well. I have seen it develop over the years from a little-travelled short stretch into its present state—absolutely burgeoning.

Four Ashes has a riding club. It has become an extremely unhappy experience to take one's horse box or trailer on the motorway even on a Saturday or Sunday,

[Mr. Mills]

because of crowded traffic conditions. In a slow-moving vehicle, one gets trapped. Even travelling at the legal speed on the M42, I am rarely able to use the right-hand lane —the fast lane—because I am holding everybody up. I have to move into the centre lane where I am passed by everything except cars towing caravans. The bigger lorries are, the faster they go. The traffic is solid at peak times. The exits on the A45, north and south, and at the island further on at Dunton, are serviced by essential part-time lights. They mean that people stop. Cars build up at the exit and eventually come to the motorway. Even at peak times, there is not a crowd of cars actually on the slow lane of the motorway.

When there are large exhibitions at the NEC, road conditions become crazy and dangerous. People either see the queue and suddenly swerve to avoid it—sometimes they do not—or are in the queue and get fed up when they suddenly realise that they still have half a mile to go, and pull out from the left-hand lane into the middle lane. With everybody in the middle lane doing 70 mph or even more, that is extremely hazardous.

It would be wrong of me to draw conclusions, because I understand that an inquest is considering these matters, but the three hon. Members who saw the Secretary of State felt that we should put forward some strong views about actions that might help to prevent any further incidents.

Certainly, a permanent 24-hour video surveillance system is essential to assess the problem. Indeally, that would be connected to a form of automatic warning signalling, but even a huge painted signal board at the key spot would be better than nothing. Warning motorists is essential. The other part of the solution is to increase the hard shoulder or the run-off area so that cars can stack up further back without getting into the slow lane of the motorway. There will be changes from the M42 to the M6 going south when the extra lane is added at some stage, but, as I learnt from discussions with officials and the Minister, that will not resolve the problem within the next couple of years.

The NEC is doubling in size and it will double its capacity to entertain and educate people. How are they to get there? A fair number come by train but most come by cars. Therefore, the NEC will need more car parks. Will cars be stacked up at the A45 island? If so, there will be cars in the slow lane down to Solihull unless something is done. Some form of dedicated exit both from the north and the south, directly into the NEC, with suitable traffic systems in the NEC to ensure the swift dispersal of cars will be essential.

I shall not detain the House much longer, as many of my colleagues wish to speak. However, I declare an interest as a long-time tyre and car man and adviser to the National Tyre Distributors Association. We are pleased that the law will be harmonised on a European basis and greatly improved. However, that will lead to confusion about what are legal and illegal tyres. Tyres are important to road safety. A car is supported by four tyres and four contact patches about the size of size 9 shoes. If a tyre does not have tread and it is raining heavily, that adds to the hazard. Some form of publicity and communications programme will be essential when the law is changed. My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) is smiling and no doubt recalling having this conversation some time ago.

Mr. Peter Bottomley: For the avoidance of doubt, I thought that tread is what is cut into the rubber—I may be wrong—and that, unless it is wet, it may be better to have no cut in it at all. The law is somewhat different. I do not think that we should propose to re-run arguments that I lost before.

Mr. Mills: I thank my hon. Friend for being so decent. Having been a tyre designer, I inform him that it is common to call the part that touches the road the tread. If it is raining, one will want more.

It is important that people understand the changes when they take place. The industry and the association will play a part in that. A form of Government education and communication will be most important.

12.33 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): This has been an interesting debate covering many road safety issues. All hon. Members, whatever party or part of the country they represent, know that we shall get letters about the poll tax, our future in Europe, and the Gulf crisis. Such matters come and go. But week after week, from January to December, we receive letters from our constituents expressing their deep concern about road safety in their areas.

As hon. Members have already said, we hear far too often about tragic accidents on our motorways, which are often attributed to the speed of the car, the driver's lack of awareness about what he or she is doing, or to the weather conditions. Those are the accidents that get the publicity. However, all hon. Members—whether we represent an inner-city constituency here in London, other large cities or even smaller towns—know what concerns our constituents. I am sure that the area that I represent is similar to many parts of the country.

I can remember when there were very few motor cars. Local residents often had motor cycles or scooters, and many had bicycles, but not many had a car. There were certainly no two-car families. As we all know, that position has completely changed, but we do not pay much attention to the key question of parking. Indeed, not much attention has been paid to it this morning. As we often hear, there is an increase in the number of cars and that is what people want. I do not dispute that, but we do not hear about where those people are supposed to park their cars, although that is a key question facing the Government and one that will face the next Labour Government who will shortly take over control of the country.

I know that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, do not represent a London constituency, but you live in London so I am sure that you will understand my next point. In many parts of London, including in my constituency and in the borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, motor vehicles are double parked at night in road after road. They remain there throughout the night, with no lights on. This is not an isolated occurrence—it happens in road after road—yet I do not believe that anything is ever done about it. I have taken up this matter with my local police, whose response is, "Well, it is difficult, sir, isn't it? Where are they supposed to park? Do you really expect us to

hound these people, because, if we do that, where can we tell them to move their motor vehicles to?" Nothing is being done about that dangerous problem.

Linked to that is another problem which we all see and which has been referred to this morning—cars that park with two or more wheels on the pavement. I have also noticed repeatedly cars which have been parked across the corners of roads. That causes problems for pedestrians, especially for mums with pushchairs, and for disabled and elderly people who can get about but who are not as mobile as they once were. They find that they have to walk into the road because a car has obstructed the corner on which they would normally wait before crossing the road. It also presents problems for other motorists who want to come out of the road into another road and who are forced to edge into the centre of the road because the parked car has obstructed their vision of the oncoming traffic. Again, I do not believe that much is ever done to curb that clear offence.

That leads me to question the Government's general policy towards ordinary men and women and their safety provisions. As I have said, when I have raised the problems of cars without lights being parked overnight and of double parking, the police say, "Yes, it is a problem, but we do not have the staff, sir, so we do not intend to do anything about it." Who has responsibility for it? I received in this morning's post a leaflet published by the London Boroughs Association. The Minister may have seen it. I should like to quote one or two of the comments that highlight the point I am trying to make. The leaflet says:

"Consider these facts. Every day 350,000 parking offences are committed in central London alone. 149 out of 150 offenders go free. A recent Government study showed that the increased enforcement activity reduced illegal parking by 45 per cent. A House of Commons Transport Committee said in 1982 that London needed 4,000 traffic wardens. The Government's current budget is for 1,800 and 500 of those posts are unfilled."

The debate has not touched on the role of traffic wardens. We know that they are not popular with motorists, but their job is essential. If a driver runs foul of a traffic warden, it is obvious that he is breaking the traffic regulations that apply in the area where his car or lorry is parked. What is the Government's policy on traffic wardens? Are they encouraging the appointment of more, and, if not, why not? Surely the appointment of more wardens is essential.

I am sure that all hon. Members have experienced complaints about motorists who drive through residential areas. The Minister was once a councillor in Wandsworth and I expect that he will know the roads that I intend to mention, even though they are in my constituency and not in the area for which he was a councillor. I and the residents of three major roads in my constituency are trying to get some safety provision. The routes are Ellerton road, Southcroft road and Longley road. During the morning and evening rush hours, dozens of motorists drive along those residential roads in an effort to avoid potential bottlenecks or hazards.

An hon. Member has asked today why people do not do more for themselves. Two weeks ago, a Mr. Gillis, who is well over 70 years of age, and who lives in Longley link road, visited my advice centre. He said, "Mr. Cox, I am absolutely fed up." I asked what was wrong. He said, "It is the sheer volume of traffic that goes through the road in which I live." He had knocked on the door of everyone who lives in that road and had drawn up a petition containing well over 200 signatures. The petition called for road humps in Longley road. Such humps undoubtedly slow down traffic, and in the other roads that I have mentioned that is what local residents want.

The problem—and I am sure other hon. Members have encountered it—is that, although we are left in no doubt about what residents want, we do not know when the road humps will be installed. In the case of Ellerton road, I have had about two years of continuing consultation, letter writing and discussion with Wandsworth council and I have given clear evidence about what people want. I am told that it is in the pipeline and that one day it will be done. People get fed up with that because they see clearly what they want and exert efforts to get a clear consensus of what people are saying. Then the authority says, "Oh yes, we will get round to it." As my hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) said, if there is no money to do the jobs, then, sadly, progress on improving safety in many of our residential areas does not take place.

There are consultations between the authority and the police. I accept that that must happen, but the time that some of the consultations take is almost unbelievable. Even if we live in a different area from that which we represent, we can quickly identify the problem and the views of local people. Unless the police or the council say that there are genuine reasons why something cannot be done, quicker action should be taken to put in place what is wanted. In this instance I am talking about humps, but there is concern about the lack of pedestrian crossings. We know that road humps reduce the speed of traffic, but in Southcroft road, for example, which no doubt the Minister will be familiar with, there is a lack of adequate pedestrian crossings. I have a letter dated 12 November from a lady who lives in Southcroft road. Part of it reads:

"One sometimes has to stand for 5 minutes or more to cross Southcroft road from one side of the road to the other."

I hope that the Department of Transport will give urgent consideration to the consultations that take place between boroughs and the police. I am sure that that problem extends beyond London and is to be found throughout the country.

When we talk about road safety and the general movement of traffic, an important consideration is bus lanes. What is the Government's policy on bus lanes? There is a bus lane outside the House, and if at 5 o'clock the Minister were to stand alongside it he would see the actions of motorists who have complete disregard for the regulations which are supposed to apply to the use of the lane. There are constant infringements.

Bus lanes are provided for the use of buses, taxis and cyclists. Many motorists, however, will drive along a bus lane to try to get a few yards ahead of law-abiding motorists, who say, "There is a bit of a jam and I shall have to wait." I am told that the fine for driving a motor car along a bus lane during the period of enforcement of the regulations governing its use is £400. It would be interesting to know how many motorists charged with the offence of driving in a bus lane have been fined £400. That applies to the bus lane outside the House and to bus lanes everywhere.

I believe that we do not have enough bus lanes. It was to the credit of the Greater London council that its policy was to introduce complete bus lane systems, not bus lanes

[Mr. Tom Cox]

that continued for a mile or so and then disappeared, only to start again somewhere else. It wanted an overall London policy for bus lanes.

I received recently a letter from a constituent who had written to a Westminster city councillor. The issue was the removal of the bus lane outside the House. The councillor claimed that problems were caused when Members of this place or the other place had to come to either House for Divisions in the afternoon. I sent on the letter to the Secretary of State for Transport and wrote something like this: "What nonsense is this person talking about?" We all know that bus lanes do not affect the rights of Members in either House when a Division is called and they have to vote. Yet that was a reason given for their removal. It would be interesting to hear from the Minister when he replies or, if he cannot do so then, in writing later, what the policy is on bus lanes. Are they being encouraged by his Department? Are there ongoing discussions with the police about repeated infringements by motorists who have no right whatever to use bus lanes during certain periods?

Hon. Members have spoken about cycle lanes, so I shall not spend too much time on them but they tie up with bus lanes. When the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) was at the Department of Transport, I wrote to him about cycle lanes, tabled questions and received replies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Deptford asked, are we making progress on the overall development of our cycle lane systems, whether in London or in other major cities? This morning we have heard about all the Members who are so healthy because they ride their bicycles and about others who encourage cycling. Cycling is wonderful. I have a bicycle here which I sometimes use because I know that I can get somewhere quicker on it than by car or because parking will be difficult. The hon. Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen), who is a keen cyclist, will agree about the need for an overall policy on cycle lanes so that a cyclist knows that after the next roundabout there will be another cycle lane. Sadly, we do not have such a system.

The boroughs must get together, but it is not good enough for the Minister to say that this must be for the boroughs to decide. A variety of decisions affect their policies. They may say, "We do not have the money this year to develop cycle lanes, so we shall postpone it for a year or two", or, "This is where a cycle lane should be." Unless the various boroughs follow an overall policy, development will be piecemeal, which causes enormous dangers for cyclists. Moreover, it stops many others who would start cycling from doing so. They fear that, although there are cycle lanes in one borough, they may not continue in another borough, so it is not worth the risk.

The next issue that I wish to raise has not been touched on. *[Interruption.]* I do not know what the hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) said, but I have listened to the Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Deptford and all the other hon. Members who have spoken. I have not left the Chamber and I have a right to make all the comments that I wish to make.

No one has referred to defective lighting on motor vehicles. Every day we see many cars on our roads which have only one working light. I have often driven along the road, especially on these dark evenings, and wondered whether in the distance I am seeing a cyclist. It is not until I come closer that I realise that it is a motor car with only one working light.

We all know about the regulations on MOT testing. If my car passed its MOT test and a month later something went wrong with the lighting, what checks would be made about that? How often do the police stop a motorist driving such a car? I am not suggesting that they should immediately prosecute, but some system should be in place. When a police officer stops a motorist to say that only one light is working, the motorist should be given some form which within the next 48 hours must be produced at his local police station, following which an officer will come and see that the defective light has been repaired. I do not believe that that is asking too much, especially if we are to believe that driving a motor car is so crucial. At 4 pm it is dusk, and by 6 pm it is dark, but far too often motorists drive at such times without proper lights. In my area, some people do that for weeks and weeks and when I ask when they intend to do something about their lights they say that they are far too busy, but that they will get round to it one day. They should be required to get something done immediately.

We have heard a lot about cyclists and the need to wear crash helmets and reflective clothing. However, we all know that some cyclists of all ages, but especially younger ones, ride without any lights. They ride not only on pavements without lights, which causes great annoyance to many people, but on the roads. We should pay much closer attention to that problem because it is for their benefit that cyclists should be properly equipped with lights as their chances of having an accident are then much reduced.

The Minister has spoken of vehicle safety, seat belts, leg protection and training. My hon. Friend the Member for Deptford was challenged when she spoke about the need for better public transport, but there is absolutely no doubt that that is crucial. However, there will always be people who, for a variety of reasons, will need a motor car. The hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) said that in his area the motor car is the only means of travel because there is a lack of public transport facilities, and I can understand that.

When the hon. Member for Eltham was responsible for road transport, he and I had a number of clashes in this House because, 18 months ago, many parts of London were threatened by the western environmental improvement route—WEIR. I do not know whether the Minister lives in Wandsworth, but he knows a bit about that area. There was an ongoing protest in Wandsworth about the potential development of that road system and public meetings were called by the local council, by me and by others who stood to be greatly affected by it. At meeting after meeting people were asked for their views of the public transport system. The overwhelming response was that people chose to use their cars, but that if the public transport system was better they would leave their cars at home.

The Minister will be aware that the Northern line of the underground runs through the Tooting and Battersea constituencies. It is an utter disgrace. A few months ago, the Minister for Public Transport inspected the line. I wrote a letter to thank him for his courtesy and the time he spent on the visit. He showed an interest and he saw at first hand some of the problems. After that visit he said that he well understood the complaints and that he too

would complain if he used the line. The passengers repeatedly say that they have had enough and that they will use their cars. If that line and public transport services in general in London were better, more people would use public transport.

The hon. Member for Eltham was in charge of road development schemes in London. They were dropped overnight by the Government. Both the Government and I know why they were dropped, but I do not intend to pursue that point. The meetings were attended by hundreds of people, not just by a handful of people who regularly attend meetings. They said that they would use better public transport, if it were provided, and leave their cars at home. In a debate such as this, we must stress that a commitment must be made urgently to improve public transport.

This excellent debate has given hon. Members in all parts of the House the opportunity to raise a number of issues that cause them concern. I hope that the Minister has taken note of what has been said and that he and his departmental and ministerial colleagues will act speedily to deal with issues that cause real concern to the people we represent.

1 pm

Mr. Roger King (Birmingham, Northfield): I am delighted to be able to contribute to this debate on road safety. It takes place after a bad road accident in the west midlands a short time ago. My hon. Friends the Members for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller) and for Meriden (Mr. Mills) have already referred to it. Before I deal with that accident and make what I hope will be relevant points about it, which I hope the Minister for Roads and Traffic will consider, I wish to deal with a number of other points that have been made in the debate about cyclists.

Until recently, I had not ridden a bicycle on a busy road for about 30 years. However, after having repaired one of my son's bikes on a fine Sunday morning I decided to venture out on the highway. I must admit that it was a pretty traumatic experience. I felt utterly vulnerable. As I cycled along I could hear the traffic coming up behind me, but I could not gauge whether the drivers could see me. It was a salutary experience, which I shall remember. The vulnerability of cyclists is appreciated by car drivers only when car drivers are also cyclists. They are more aware of the vulnerability of cyclists and will endeavour to take them more into account while they are at the car wheel.

As for the M42 road accident, it is a strange fact of life that had it been a rail disaster in which six people had been killed and seven injured, or an air disaster in which a similar number of people has been killed and injured, a statement would almost certainly have been made about it in the House. If there is a rail accident, an inquiry is conducted, either by the railways inspectorate or, if it is an extraordinarily bad accident, by a Queen's counsel who is appointed to conduct a full public inquiry. That does not happen, however, after a road accident. I presume that somebody conducts an investigation into what happened. The insurance companies must do so. The police will make a report. If people have died, there will be an inquest which will try to establish the cause of death. It is open to debate, however, whether we learn anything from such tragedies. Unless someone co-ordinates all the evidence, analyses the causes of the accident and prepares a report, who learns from that type of accident? Is it just dismissed as one of those things that happen and is likely to happen again?

We could learn many lessons from the recent M42 accident if only someone took the time and the trouble to analyse what happened. My hon. Friends the Members for Bromsgrove and for Meriden have already described the location of the accident. It took place on a very busy part of the motorway system where the M42 crosses underneath, by means of a flyover-slip road arrangement, the extremely busy A45 Birmingham to Coventry road that connects with Birmingham's national exhibition centre, the international airport and the international railway station. Those are all areas that experience dramatic increases in passenger throughput, which are further increased by showgoers. Everyone knows that when the national exhibition centre is busy there are problems at that junction.

On Tuesday 6 November, there were six exhibitions at the NEC. The weather was fine—there was no question of there being any fog or bad weather—and when the accident occurred, at 11.45 am, conditions were almost ideal.

Tailbacks were assumed to be expected. Comments after the accident, which were well reported in all the newspapers, made it clear that traffic had been monitored by the police earlier that morning and that there were no problems. However, it gradually emerged from other comments that there had been a major problem at the junction earlier in the morning.

Passing motorists reported that traffic was especially confused. A temporary marker board indicated to traffic travelling in a northerly direction that one of the lanes of the slip road at the junction had been closed off. There were no warning lights, but drivers anxious to join the slip road were obviously hesitant about which lane to take. The hard shoulder just before the junction was coned off as work was taking place, but both lanes on the slip road were open. Traffic had formed a single lane by the road works. Drivers then had to move out of that lane to the other lane. We must remember that the roundabout at the junction was controlled by traffic lights and that, by the time of the accident, the tailback stretched back on to the motorway.

A heavy goods vehicle ran into the traffic. It may have been travelling too fast or have been driven erratically—we must wait to see what action the police take with regard to the drivers involved.

Speed is always a factor in accidents. If there is an impact, speed is part of the problem but it is not the whole problem. Comments made after the accident were interesting. An officer was reported in a newspaper as saying:

"Officers monitored the junction earlier because six NEC shows were being held. When checked there were no tailbacks and so warning lights on the motorway were not switched on."

There was no indication of when the motorway had been checked.

Chief Superintendent Tony Warren said:

"Warning lights were operating at the approach to the NEC on the opposite"——

the southbound——

"carriageway, but we had no reports of any tailbacks on the northbound section."

Chief Inspector John Hayward of the central motorway traffic unit commented:

[Mr. Roger King]

"It came down to motorists not driving at the speed at which they could brake safely"—

a fairly reasonable comment.

Meanwhile, Mike Stevens, a member of the public who was involved in the accident but managed to walk away unharmed—a resident of Barston—stated that after the accident the police said, "We've told them again and again that this sort of accident would happen."

Of course, speed is a factor, but many other questions are left unanswered, and an inquest would be hard put to probe all the questions that need to be answered. I do not think that we could expect a satisfactory outcome.

I make no allegations about what I think happened because I do not know. Inded, it is because I do not know that I am anxious to find out. I have received a wide divergence of opinion since I expressed my concern that this motorway accident would be labelled as another accident which was due to motorists' failure to anticipate traffic conditions which should have been abundantly obvious to them, that therefore nothing further would happen, that the accident would be dismissed as a tragedy and that it was almost to be expected. There are questions and evidence that should be considered much more carefully.

At 11.15 am, half an hour before the accident, Joy Morgan, my constituent, was travelling with her husband on their way to Leicester. They experienced, in her words, "confused traffic", "confused signposting", "but no warning". She expressed grave concern about the confusion caused by coning off the hard shoulder and motorists' expectation that the slip road was at least restricted, causing traffic to mill about. No warning sign was shown on the motorway. Mrs. Morgan telephoned the police that evening to give them her evidence, but apparently they were not particularly interested. We can establish that at 11.15 am the tailback on to the motorway at the northbound junction was substantial. Tailbacks do not just happen—they take a while to build up. I submit that that junction was experiencing problems nearly 50 minutes before the accident—50 minutes in which, knowing of the exhibitions and knowing the pressures on that junction, the motorway police had obviously not given that road any attention, as the signs had not been lit up to warn traffic.

I can do not better than repeat the words of a letter by Mr. R. J. Hughes of Solihull. I cannot comment on his integrity, but people do not normally write letters if they do not stand by their evidence. Mr. Hughes began:

"Further to your articles in *Evening Mail* of Wednesday 7th November",

which described the accident. He continued:

"My purpose in writing is to set out the situation as I saw it at around 10am sometime before the event—one-and-three-quarter hours before the accident."

Mr. Hughes continued:

"I have not written to the Police as no doubt my comments of what I saw some 2 hours before the accident would be considered irrelevant.

I confirm the statements of the driver who passed the scene 'moments' before the crash re confusion created by a sign a mile before the junction indicating that only one lane of the slip road was open and also his comments re the queue and the fact that drivers were pulling out into the second lane (this was also true at 10am).

I feel the police comment on Page 3 that 'we had no reports of any tailbacks on the northbound section' is hard to believe.

At 10am tailbacks were building up on both carriageways and were already a danger and causing confusion. I confirm that I saw a police car and police on the bridge over the Motorway and a police Range Rover on the hard shoulder of the opposite carriageway.

Whilst not condoning or accusing the irresponsibility of so many drivers today, it appeared to me some considerable time before the event, that such a result was inevitable and for experienced traffic police who appeared to have a considerable presence on the scene so long before not to have taken action to minimise the dangers is difficult to understand and in view of the deaths so hard to accept."

At the coroner's inquest earlier this week, Chief Inspector John Hayward of the central motorway police, said:

"I firmly believe that if the tailback had been monitored then a signal could have been exhibited."

According to eye-witness accounts, the tailback was monitored by the police, so why were the lights not triggered at 10 o'clock at least, well before the accident? Can an inquest sort out this confusion? Is an inquest into such a grave issue capable of seeking and calling witnesses to establish what went wrong? There may be sensible and reasonable answers to these questions. The writer of that letter may have been confused and may not have fully appreciated what the police were looking at, if they were there, or what conclusions they reached. I have visited that roundabout and seen for myself that, from the place where the police were reported to be, they could adequately have seen the junction and the traffic build-up without having to move.

There are many questions about the accident and I believe that we owe those who died, those who were injured and all the members of the travelling public answers to them. It is not enough to conduct inquiries in the traumatic atmosphere of a coroner's court. Inquiries need to be conducted by experts who can call witnesses, as is the case with rail and air disasters, so that we can find out what happened. We could then learn from such accidents and not merely dismiss them into the hands of insurance companies which will fight about who was responsible.

We must ask ourselves for example, if the police were saying to somebody, "We've told them that junction's no good", whom they were telling and why no action was taken. We knew that the junction was no good in its construction and in its monitoring by electronic instruments, as my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden has already pointed out. Why were no cameras installed at the junction? For years, the dangers of the junction have been known. I have experienced the danger of having to queue on the motorway to get on to the junction. I and my hon. Friends the Members for Bromsgrove and for Meriden went to see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State earlier this week on another matter. We asked him whether priority could be given to installing cameras at the junction immediately—not in six months' time—to avoid any repetition of such an accident at a known danger spot.

We need to establish the speed and conduct of heavy goods vehicles on the approach to the junction and whether they would have benefited from speed limiters. These questions will be examined by the police, but they should also be examined in a public court of inquiry. We need to consider the crash barriers, especially those at the side of the motorway. From the photographs, it seems that cars caught between the heavy goods vehicle and the crash barriers received enormous pressure which may have been

a contributory factor to the injuries received. Are the barriers too strong for the work that they are supposed to do?

It is not sufficient to dismiss such major accidents as an act of God and it is not enough to say that with about 80 million individual road journeys each day, there are bound to be accidents. It is true that independently driven vehicles are likely to collide, but we shall never develop a better and safer system unless we learn publicly from mistakes. All too often, we never hear of the causes of such accidents. It is high time to pull away the cloud of controversy and to analyse the accident moment by moment. I am not making allegations about what went wrong. Ultimately, the accident was caused by bad driving, but that was not the only factor. For many years, other things had gone wrong at that junction, although those faults may have been compounded by individual mistakes. We owe it to those who died to try to find out what those mistakes were.

1.17 pm

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Our debate today is on an extremely important subject. I have listened to the Minister in many debates but I never thought that I could listen to him speaking for as long as he has today—I do not criticise him for it—without disagreeing violently with almost everything that he said. Normally, he could not speak for two minutes without my disagreeing strongly with his argument. It was very different this morning. I agreed with almost everything that he said, which was a welcome change.

I am no newcomer to the subject and I can claim a long pedigree in having raised issues of road safety. When I first stood for the local council in 1960, the local press dubbed me a campaigner for greater road safety and especially for greater pedestrian safety. At that time, I argued that the then Ministry of Transport seemed to be concerned mainly about the movement of traffic and that pedestrians came far lower down the scale. I argued that more emphasis might be placed on pedestrian safety if we had a Minister responsible for it. We have come a long way since then but, in considering pedestrians, we must always remember that all of us—whether motorists, cyclists or motorcyclists—are pedestrians at times, so we all have a vested interest in pedestrian safety.

I wish to refer to two points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox). As he said, parking on pavements causes great difficulties to pedestrians and we need to do something about it. Linked with that is the question of parking at corners and at junctions, which makes access difficult and means that other drivers have to swing their cars cars further out into the road, manoeuvring with difficulty, to turn the corner or cross the junction. Moreover, most pedestrians cross at or near junctions and it is extremely difficult for them to do so if a car is parked there. We must work to improve matters in that respect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting also referred to pedestrian crossings in his area. I have had similar difficulties in making the case for crossings in my constituency. We all accept that we must have a reasonable number of pedestrian crossings: we cannot place crossings at 100-yard intervals because that will defeat the object and cause more problems than it solves. But the criteria for determining the approval of crossings are wholly unrealistic. We must examine local circumstances more closely in determining whether approval should be granted, as well as continuing to take into account traffic flows and patterns and national figures. There may only be a problem at certain times of day but at those times the lack of a crossing is not just a problem for people wishing to cross the road but a road safety problem. I am not saying that we should allow masses of pedestrian crossings, but we should examine local circumstances more realistically in determining whether they are needed and whether they will be in the interests of safety. If we decide that they are, we should allow them to be provided.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) referred to hazard signs—the flashing or standing signs on the motorways. I referred to that subject last Friday during our debate on the Gracious Speech and I have raised it on numerous occasions. As I have said repeatedly, we must ensure not only that we have more and better illuminated signs and hazard warning systems on all our major motorways and trunk roads but that they give the correct information. If they do not, they will be disregarded, and that will be more of a problem than if we had not put them there in the first place. I drive on motorways every week. I have to go to Herefordshire this afternoon and on to Burnley in the middle of the night and I know that I am bound to see signs giving speed limits where there is in fact no problem at all. No doubt I will then reach a sign giving the all-clear and saying that the speed limit is back up to 70 mph and, within 100 yards or so, I shall have to brake solidly because traffic on the carriageway ahead will be at a standstill. That does not occur on odd occasions, it happens week after week. It occurs all over the country. Until we get this right, we shall have problems. This problem is serious, and everyone who drives on our motorways and major roads will be aware of it.

Sometimes the sign states that the nearside lane is closed, but when the hazard is reached one discovers that a different lane has been closed. Traffic has changed lane in preparation for the hazard as described on the sign but then has to change again suddenly when the reality becomes clear. I could give many other examples, but the point is already clear. The Minister understands that it is crucial that we correct that problem. In passing, I must state that the problem varies slightly in different parts of the country. I remember driving along the M65 in my constituency when a caravan became detached on the opposite carriageway and crashed into the central barrier. I stopped on the hard shoulder and used the emergency telephone. Before I got back into my car, the signs were flashing on the other carriageway indicating that there was a problem.

The Minister and his predecessor will be aware that I have had correspondence with them about directional signs. They made one or two concessions, but the standard of signposting in this country still needs to be improved. If people leave a main road and approach a junction or a roundabout, they frequently find that the place names that they have been following for some distance are no longer mentioned. That not only causes problems for people in terms of reaching their destination, it also creates a traffic hazard because the motorist hesitates, not knowing whether to go left, right or straight ahead. Signposting of that kind is all very well if people know precisely where they are going, but if people are in doubt such signs are not helpful.

[Mr. Peter L. Pike]

So many signs are poorly painted and maintained. Frequently the lights do not work and the signs are not illuminated not just for the odd day but for weeks on end. There is an extremely poor standard of signposting on motorways and other roads. The same applies to local directional signs and through routes. I drive round the Blackburn ring road on my way home and I have noticed that one half of a sign has disappeared and the other half is so faint that it cannot be read. Another sign which used to give distances has completely disappeared. That problem exists throughout the country and it adds to safety hazards. I raise it as a safety issue because hesitancy and doubt in a driver's mind cause confusion as the driver has to think where he is going when he should be paying closer attention to traffic conditions.

I strongly agree with the Minister about speed limits. Heavy vehicles on motorways tend to get right on the tail of the car in front. They almost touch the bumper. A driver might be travelling at 70 mph, but the heavy goods vehicle behind will flash its lights and force a way through. That is extremely dangerous. When a maximum speed is signed, people are not necessarily expected to travel at that speed. The real speed limit depends on safety, road and weather conditions and other factors. If those conditions require people to drive at a speed lower than the signed limit, that is the speed at which people should be driving.

The Minister also referred to speeding in rural areas, where there is a theoretical 60 mph limit on many roads. There may be bends and turns on those roads, but the people who know them hurtle along in the centre of the road at 60 mph in the belief that if the limit is 60 mph they ought to drive at that speed, whether or not it is safe to do so. We must ensure that people drive at safe speeds. That should be the criterion for determining the speed at which we drive.

Road spray is an extremely hazardous problem on motorways in poor weather conditions. We need an improvement in vehicle flaps. I shall not pursue that point as it has been covered on many occasions in the past, but sometimes when one has to pass vehicles there is a period when one cannot see anything at all ahead. One has no idea whether there is stationary traffic ahead—one just has to take the gamble, albeit momentarily. That is extremely dangerous. In a country with a climate such as ours, when there are wide expanses of concrete, asphalt and tarmac and a lack of drainage, we are bound to get spray. I appreciate that putting drains alongside motorways would cause major problems and that there would be safety problems. I do not pretend to know the answer, but we must accept that weather conditions mean that there will be more water lying on our motorways than on those in countries where it does not rain so frequently. Therefore, road spray will be a bigger problem here.

We must bear in mind the width of some motorways now. Most have four lanes, and there may be five or six lanes if we include the hard shoulder. That is an extremely large area, and when it rains heavily water cannot escape other than to the edge of the motorway. Sometimes that is not sufficient. Those issues are extremely important.

I hope that what the Minister said is correct. I am glad that motor manufacturers are announcing that safety is an increasingly important factor which motorists take into account when they purchase a vehicle. When members of the Select Committee were at the Ford premises last year, we were told that people looking at expensive cars want better stereo systems and so on rather than anti-lock braking systems and other things that would improve safety. Obviously, I hope that motorists will start to demand safer and better vehicles, but if there is not to be a consumer-led demand, we as parliamentarians and the Minister as a representative of the Government have a responsibility to do everything possible to ensure that we force motor manufacturers to introduce sensible safety improvements in the concept and design of cars whenever possible.

I shall not repeat many of the other subjects that have been touched on, but they are important matters. I hope not only that we shall achieve the target of a one third reduction in casualty rates by the year 2000 but that we shall surpass that target before then. We have a responsibility to the nation to achieve safety standards on our roads as soon as possible.

1.34 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (South Hams): Having served for about 130 hours with the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) on the Standing Committee which considered the bus legislation, I know that his interest in transport and transport matters was well known to the Committee and is becoming well known to the House. Just as he agreed with nearly everything that the Minister said, I agree with nearly everything that the hon. Gentleman said. A consensus is obviously developing in this debate.

The hon. Member for Burnley also mentioned rural matters. As most of the hon. Members who have participated in the debate represent primarily urban or suburban constituencies, I hope that the House would now like to hear from a Member representing a rural constituency. The trouble with rural England is that we have winding roads—that is the beauty of Britain. My constituency is in south Devon, where the county planners have assumed that if all the winding roads are straightened they will be made much safer. Tremendous mistakes are being made all over the country as planners and local politicians spend a lot of public money straightening our winding roads. Britain's countryside is beginning to change as the winding roads, which are part of the beauty of rural England, become straighter. It is as if we want to return to Roman times and to build narrow straight roads. I am totally opposed to that, because, far from making road travel safer, all the evidence suggests that straightening rural roads makes them more dangerous.

I should like to give an example of what has happened in a tiny village just outside Totnes, in Devon, called Berry Pomeroy. It has a very winding road, with hills that are 1 : 6. As the road was so narrow, drivers acted with great caution because they were not sure whether they could pass each other. Everything was going fine—children going to the local school could cross the road because it was so narrow and cars went slowly through the village. What happened? The planners got the brilliant idea that they should widen and straighten the road, and that is just what they did, with public money. They widened the road with community chargepayers' money. So what happens now? The traffic goes through the village at three times its previous speed. The primary school parents are now all up in arms and want what they call "traffic-calming measures"—some sort of tranquilisers for cars. They want

cars to be slowed down by humps. Not only have we straightened the road, which means that all the cars now go faster and make it unsafe, but we now want to spend more public money installing traffic-calming measures so that the cars will slow down again. The Minister should take a grip of the situation before more and more county authorities want more and more public money for those two transport measures.

In another part of my constituency, the so-called traffic-calming measures have been put on a fast road. What happens? The cars use the wrong side of the road so that they can avoid the humps because they are not comfortable to go over. That is not very clever either. Such terrible traffic-calming measures have been used at Paddington station that a car's suspension can be wrecked if one drives over them at more than 1 mph. I have tried to get over them, and even at 1 mph it cannot be done because one's car goes backwards and hits the car behind. All this is getting quite out of hand.

The whole business about safety and speed needs to be put into perspective. I hope that the Minister will stop county councils straightening rural England because it is more dangerous, expensive and leads to other expenses. In addtion, it leads to the destruction of the countryside. Whenever a road is widened in south Devon, the hedgerows are destroyed. On the one hand, the farmers are putting back the hedgerows with the help of Government grants, while, on the other hand, the county is taking the hedgerows away with other Government grants. I know that the Minister is not a magician, but he should be aware of the problem and of the fact that we are spending double the amount of community chargepayers' money on all these operations which are not making rural England better; they are making it look worse and become more dangerous.

Hon. Members who have been here for a few years may know that, together with my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton (Sir G. Young), I started the House of Commons and House of Lords Cycling Club. We used to have a lot of pedalling Members of Parliament who would cycle around London. Because cycling in London has become so dangerous and so difficult, our membership has taken a dramatic downturn—although we have not lost any of our colleagues as a result of cycling.

A few weeks ago, I spent a couple of days cycling in Copenhagen, where it is totally safe. Everybody is cycling because the entire city has been designed for cyclists. The same is true of Holland. There is no reason why this should not be done in London. The problem in London is too many cars: it is as simple as that. We must reduce the number of cars, but we will not do so simply by having many more traffic wardens; that just means more public expenditure. The way to reduce the number of cars is to have a good public transport system and a good taxi system which is not too expensive and to allow the possibility of cycling everywhere.

Cycling is not an accepted way of travelling in Britain. It seems slightly bizarre and eccentric. When I visit a Government Department other than the Department of Transport and try to park my bicycle, I am told to move it round the corner because it spoils the environmental beauty of the building. Cycling is not accepted as a bona fide way of travelling. When one goes to a club in Pall Mall and parks one's bicycle outside, one is asked to move it round the corner because club members would not like to see a cycle parked in front of the club.

First, the Minister should make cycling far more acceptable. That means that it must be made less dangerous, and that can be done by handing pots of yellow paint to all the traffic wardens. Instead of sticking tickets on cars, all the traffic wardens should set out on Monday and paint a yellow line 5 ft or 6 ft from the edge of the main roads. That would be the cycling lane, and it would be perfectly feasible as long as cars were not allowed to park there. The trouble with our arterial routes is that everybody parks on them. Cycle lanes throughout the capital would not cost much, and cycling is a simple way to travel.

Secondly, we should consider whether to introduce legislation for helmets. Obviously, cycling is potentially dangerous, but only because of cars. I have never heard of a cyclist killing somebody, but people are killed by cars. The cyclist on his own is quite safe.

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): Surely my hon. Friend must see in London every day cyclists going the wrong way in one way streets and going through traffic lights. If a motorist hits such a cyclist and kills him, the motorist will get the blame. Does my hon. Friend agree that cyclists should begin to obey the law rather than blatantly flouting it, as they often do each day?

Mr. Steen: I am always glad of interventions from my hon. Friend because they are always highly relevant. He is right. Cyclists flout the law almost as often as motorists. We have heard that motorists are parking on pavements and breaking tens of thousands of regulations. The problems relate to traffic volume and to the fact that cyclists become frustrated. I am a cyclist and I know that we cannot get through all the cars that are stopped in jams by the side of the kerb or just parked. Cyclists do things they should not do, and it is congestion that is causing the problem. I am suggesting a way to reduce that congestion so that cyclists can get about and will therefore become perfectly lawful. I am sure that car drivers will become lawful as well because, as I say, it is the volume of traffic that is causing the problem. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg) and I could discuss this matter at a later date.

Because of the number of cars on the motorway, it took me eight and a half hours to drive to the west country last Friday. Today I have to go by plane, which will get me there much quicker. I apologise in advance to the Minister because I shall not be here for his reply. I hope that he will speak about the straightening of rural roads and about cycling.

1.43 pm

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Eltham): People occasionally ask me why I have been so enthusiastic about reducing casualties, I should again like to share with the House the first paragraph of an article that Auberon Waugh wrote on 15 February 1986. I read it two weeks after I took on the job of Under-Secretary at the Department of Transport. The article was entitled:

"A Journey into the water that is under the Earth".

In that article Auberon Waugh wrote:

"Others have lost sisters before. Every day people lose husbands, wives, parents, children and friends they have loved whose loss reduces every perspective to dullness, misery and pain. In many cases they carry the pain around with them for the rest of their lives. At moments like this, one realises that under the surface of polite society there is a great well of sadness and bereavement, an aspect of the human condition

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which is as inescapable as it is seldom remarked, yet looming larger in many people's lives than any of the things they pretend to think important. The only excuse for allowing my own howl of anguish to be heard is to give those as yet unbereaved a glimps into the hellish blackness lying under the surface of their lives before they sensibly turn away and think of something else."

Auberon Waugh's sister, Margaret, was run over on a north London street. She was one of 1,700 pedestrians who were killed that year and every year on our roads. Mr. Waugh may be right in saying that he, his family and his friends had no interest in how or why it happened, but the rest of us do.

Those engaged in the reduction of road casualties include politicians, people at local authority level, who are responsible for looking after 96 per cent. of our roads, and many engineers and researchers, as well as a fair number of people in the media.

I say to the media that covering the causes and consequences of road crashes is neither so easy that it is not worth doing nor so difficult that it cannot be done frequently.

On Monday, there was a statement on the Piper Alpha disaster. Those who lost their lives in that disaster amounted to the same number who die every 10 weeks in drink-related road crashes alone. What happens when there is a rail crash in which six people are killed?

It should be remembered that 14 people died yesterday on our roads and not one of them seems to have been mentioned in the national press. I welcome the chance to participate once a year in a debate of this sort which is not tied specifically to one piece of proposed legislation, but we should be asking more than once a year why our national newspapers or motoring magazines are not represented in the House today and on other occasions.

People may want to ask why "Today", TV-am and all the other programmes that help to set a national agenda were not telephoning people yesterday to say, "Will you appear on our radio programme this morning or on television this evening?" I have been telephoned by representatives of the media on several occasions during the past week. Not one of the calls had anything to do with the killing of 14 people each day on our roads, 5,300 a year. They were all to do with the prospects of the leadership of a political party.

Mr. Alex Carlile: The hon. Gentleman told them that he wanted to propose his wife for leader.

Mr. Bottomley: I must not be distracted.

If we want to continue the reduction in the rate at which we kill or injure one another on the roads, we shall not do it primarily by legislation, or by exhortation. We shall do it by changes in our roads, in our vehicles and in how we behave.

How we behave depends on our understanding and our attitude. It depends also on the information that we receive. That information comes through broadcasts and the printed word in newspapers and magazines.

Some of the most influential broadcasters are people such as Derek Jameson, who was talking this morning on Radio 2 about the importance of children wearing seat belts in the back of cars. We could have reports of road crashes, in which passengers sitting in the backs of cars and not wearing seat belts are killed, on the basis that the incidents were potential offences under health and safety at work legislation.

A major oil company lost a main board director and his wife when the car in which they were travelling was involved in a crash. The driver, who was obliged by law to wear a seat belt, survived. The passengers, who were sitting in the back, were killed. It will take some time for the regulations that my hon. Friend the Minister has proposed to take effect. Who could seriously regard himself to be fully suitable to be the director of a main company if he exposes himself and his wife unnecessarily to the doubled risk of injury or death in a crash by sitting in the back of a car without wearing a seat belt?

I no longer find myself so often being driven by members of the RUC in Northern Ireland or by members of the Government car service in Britain—I pay tribute to the regular drivers of both organisations—but sometimes I find myself riding in limousines that have been provided by an outside body. I am fed up with finding the seat belt and buckle in the back underneath the seat on which I am resting. It is crazy that so many people who make their money by hiring cars, whether owned by the driver or a firm, remove the small instrument that can cut the risk in a crash by half.

On page 55 of "Road Accidents: Great Britain, The Casualty Report" there is a graph which should be in everyone's hands. It should be reproduced far more often. It relates the rate of casualties to the number of vehicles and the distance travelled.

There is no problem in reducing the rate of injury related to distance travelled by 30 per cent. by the year 2000. We are already a long way towards that goal.

The problem is that, with prosperity, more and more people have cars. Soon we may have the same number of cars per head as there are in Spain. It will take us many years to have as many cars per head as there are in France, Germany, Australia or the United States. I hope that the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock) will forgive me if I say in passing—I do not want to introduce partisanship into this—that developing and improving public transport is no substitute for dealing with roads. It is not.

Plenty of people are not yet sufficiently well off to have a car, let alone past that stage and so well off that they can do without a car. We must face the consequences of extra cars and extra distance travelled.

The target of reducing the number of casualties, which is different from the rate, by one third, will not be met for slight injuries. From now on, we should do what perhaps others and I should have done to begin with, which is to set a target for reducing the number of those who are killed and seriously injured because it is the consequences of those crashes which matter most to people.

We cannot know the names that will be on the gravestones or written in books of remembrance, but we do know the people who will be in that category.

There will be 600 motor cyclists. Motor cyclists are perhaps 20 times more likely to be killed in a motor accident if they are under 20 as if they are over 25. The crucial problem is with young, inexperienced motor cyclists.

There will be 300 dead cyclists. As we have heard, 80 per cent. of them will die as a result of a collision with

another vehicle or with a lamp post, or because the front mud guard falls onto the wheel, having the effect of an emergency brake and sending the cyclist head over heels.

There will be 2,700 people in cars. About 800 of the deaths of people in vehicles will prove to be linked to drink. The driver will be above the legal limit which, as has already been established, is well above the safety limit.

The only safe limit for driving is nil—no alcohol. Those who say that they need one or two drinks before they drive are as dependent on alcohol as those who take five pints or three double whiskies.

Several steps can be taken by people other than the Government, but there are steps that the Government should take. I fear that at a European level we are dealing with serious issues in an amateurish way. I occasionally fall out with my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) about his tyre tread groove depth. I accept his advice on which is the groove and which is the tread. There was absolutely no evidence for the European requirement to increase our tread groove depths, but it was done because it sounded right. It is a mild extra expense to motorists and does not matter that much. It was not a battle worth fighting to the end of the line.

Nevertheless, it was the wrong approach by Europe. If Europe were asked how many lives would be saved by imposing that increase in tyre tread groove depths, the answer should have been none, because it does not add to safety.

The other European issue in which I became involved —it was the only one on which I promised to resign if I was unsuccessful—was the proposal to require those who drive minibuses to have passed a public service vehicle test. That failed the test of saving lives. If the effect had been to move people from being transported in minibuses to being transported in ordinary cars, the risk of injury would have increased. We had the information. It is always sad when those who ask Governments at European or national level to take action on the grounds that it would improve road safety are then exposed to the criticism that they have not found the evidence.

I am not saying that everything should be strictly logical—I am not that much of a Powellite—but the reason why Britain has the safest roads in the world is that we tend to try things out. If they work we extend their use; if not, we move on to something else. That approach is not common in Europe, but it should be, because European co-operation, especially in vehicle design, is critical.

It is a European scandal that the consumer movement of Europe has not forced other European Governments to push as hard as our Government to get pedestrian-friendly vehicles. Most of the 1,700 pedestrians who will die in a crash will do so because they hit or are hit by a car. Some will die in crashes with motor cycles, bicycles or heavy goods vehicles, but most of them will die in a collision with cars. If a car hits a pedestrian at a speed of more than 20 or 30 mph, the pedestrian is not likely to survive, but most crashes do not occur at such a speed.

Ninety per cent. of motor cycle crashes occur at speeds of less than 40 mph and 75 per cent. at less than 30 mph. If I am hit by a car travelling at 15 mph I want the front of that car to be pedestrian-friendly—I want to have a chance to survive that collision. At the moment cyclists and pedestrians are less likely to survive such a crash.

I hope that the Consumers Association will start to raise the awareness of other European consumers. I pay tribute to *Auto Express*, which is the only motoring magazine that gives the time it takes for a car to stop at a certain speed, let alone how fast it takes to reach a certain speed. That magazine's European sisters should start to campaign for pedestrian-friendly vehicle design.

The front of vehicles should have a bit of give to provide the de-acceleration that makes it more likely that the pedestrian will survive. I hope that similar progress will be made on side impact protection. We have heard about Euro-sid, the European side-impact dummy, for long enough, but no requirements have been given to automobile engineers. They could do so much to build in the protection for people outside and inside vehicles when subject to a frontal impact. We already know what could be done as a result of clever engineering.

It is scandalous that there is no European standard requiring a steering wheel of a car to be face-friendly. If I am in a crash and I am held back by the safety strap, but my face comes forward, there are still too many cars, including new ones, whose steering wheels will cause me more facial injury than those designed to the standard developed at the Transport and Road Research Laboratory at Crowthorne. Those improvements could be made at no extra cost.

Mr. Eguchi of Yamaha, who led the Japanese automobile manufacturers association, provided me with an extremely interesting tour of Japan when I met the four major Japanese motor cycle manufacturers.

I am pleased to praise Mr. Eguchi and his other honourable colleagues for the work they have done in Japan to raise safety awareness among motor cyclists. As a result of my interest they started to extend to Britain the Japanese habit of putting safety information on advertisements designed to attract motor cyclists. I approved of that and I welcomed that initiative. The problem is that the size of print they now use is so small that it looks like a printer's blur rather than important information. That information cannot be communicated to people unless they have a microscope. I ask them to do it in a way that shows that they are proud of being interested in road safety rather than ashamed of it.

What Japanese manufacturers should be ashamed of —I apologise for saying this openly, but I have said it privately for many years and it is right to put it on record —is that although they are able to manufacture motor cars and motor bikes that are among the best in the world, they do not demonstrate—although they cannot claim that they do not have it—that they have the technical competence or the humanitarian interest to make available, at least as optional extras on motor bikes, particularly on those bikes that learner motor cyclists use up to the age of 20—years that are so critical—improved designs and then to manufacture what the Transport and Road Research Laboratory has already designed at Crowthorne.

The British approach—to see whether something works and, if it does not, to try again from a different angle—has been successful. We have designed impact guards to protect the legs of motor cyclists. If I were to buy a motor bike today, I could purchase anything I liked to go on it —all the kit that fills the pages of *Motor Cycle News*. However, if I bought any kind of Japanese motor bike, I could not purchase leg protectors for it.

When I went to Japan, I took with me the TRRL's leg protector, but the Japanese were modest about letting me have an exchange rate for the design of such a product. It was an unimpressive performence.

[Mr. Bottomley]

When I asked the Minister whether information that is publicly available could be used by an American litigation lawyer, I was making a serious point. At some stage, people will reach the conclusion that a reasonably competent engineer could look at the evidence and say that if any motor cycle manufacturer does not believe that serious leg injuries could be prevented by offering, at least as an option, leg protectors, he will expose himself to product liability risks that may have the same impact on motor cycles as the free-wheel, all-terrain vehicle product liability claim in the United States when, after the death of 1,000 young Americans, they were taken off the market. I hope that that message will get through to the corporate headquarters of every motor cycle manufacturer.

I turn to some of the consistent work that is carried out by the Parliamentary Advisory Council on Transport Safety. It was formed to ensure that the wearing of seat belts became the law of the land. Many of those who opposed the compulsory wearing of seat belts in the front seats of cars now realise that it has had a good impact and that it is worth extending the wearing of seat belts to children who sit in the rear seats of cars. PACTS provides the continuity that Minister and officials are unable to provide.

I support nearly all the work that PACTS is doing. The only area of disagreement is not something that I wish to highlight today, but I ask again: where is the evidence that random breath testing, the purpose of which is to reduce the amount of drink driving, has been more successful than breath testing in a period when there was no random testing?

I am not arguing today against random breath testing, though one could say that there is no need for it. In my three and a half years as a Transport Minister, not a single motorist who was tested complained, for obvious reasons. The person who never drinks and drives regards himself as the innocent victim. Therefore, he is not interested in making a complaint. A person who is found to have consumed some alcohol, but who is below the legal limit says, "There, but for the grace of God, go I." The person who is above the legal limit says that he has been caught bang to rights. Almost by definition, it is unlikely that there will be any complaint about anyone having been tested. The only person who cannot legally be tested at the moment is the person whom the police believe has not been drinking, who has not committed a drink-driving offence and who has not been involved in a crash or collision. No extension of the law is needed.

To return to a question that I put to the British Medical Association, PACTS, James Dunbar and everyone else, because I am genuinely interested in obtaining the information: which country has reduced its drink driving faster, with random breath testing, than we have during an equivalent number of years? The hon. Member for Deptford may say that we have done very well up to now but that there is much more to do. There are still 840 deaths that have been proved to be related to drinking and driving. If that is what she wants to say, I accept it. I would try to carry out better surveys. That is what the Department of Transport and the Central Office of Information have been doing—I wish that the results had been better publicised by the media—by trying to monitor the amount of drink driving.

For 20 years, Ministers ducked requests from researchers for random surveys of drink driving—similar to random breath testing but without prosecution. The popular press always greet that as an amnesty for drink-driving killers, but it is nothing of the sort. Such surveys have now been carried out for two or three years and the information that they provide is helpful.

They show that at drink driving times—at pub closing time on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights—four out of five drivers have not been drinking, 49 out of 50 are below the legal limit, and 499 out of 500 are under twice the legal limit.

At the same time, the police are catching 1,000 people each week who have twice the legal limit or above and 1,000 people with between the legal limit and twice that amount. That shows that targeted testing is an effective way to catch serious offenders, and that near certain conviction and disqualification for those above the legal limit is an important part of our strategy.

We need to know how the figures change, and random surveys are an important means. We also need to know the number of occasions each week on which men drink and drive. In 1986, surveys showed that there were 2 million such occasions each week—that was probably a European low. However, 2 million occasions each week when people are between two and five times more likely to be involved in a crash, or to be injured, is far too many. The surveys show that within two and a half years that figure has come down to 600,000—we cut two thirds off remaining drink driving, and in the years up to 1986 probably two thirds of drink driving had already stopped.

Apparently our approach had been working well. Figures which show that our death rate has fallen fastest, demonstrate that the alliance which included brewers, publicans and clubs has been important. Success depends upon reinforcing social attitudes.

We should pay tribute to brewers who have voluntarily developed better low alcohol and non-alcoholic beers, and have kept away from any association with motor racing —they are not allowed to associate alcohol with motor racing in advertisements on television.

I must mention the brewers Courage, who did well to get the co-operation of so many car manufacturers to provide the advertisement, "Don't drink and drive" which is paid for. That is clear advice, it was brave of Courage, and it has not been done in other countries.

The first outside brewer to think that it had the good idea of associating alcohol with motor racing was Canadian. Shortly after sponsoring two cars in a series of races televised by the BBC, it decided to sponsor anti-drink driving, rather than its own name. I pay tribute to the way in which it realised where its long-term interests lay.

I deeply regret that the organisers of the British grand prix at Silverstone sold out to Foster's, and allowed it to put its name all over that grand prix—it was a mistake. Until now, it may not have been a commercial mistake, but I believe that it will become so apparent that it is wrong, that Foster's will withdraw. I ask it to do so.

If Foster's gets away with sponsoring motor racing, all the British brewers will abandon their voluntary agreement, and the Minister will rightly decide not to allow such sponsorship and to introduce regulations or law—that is the last thing that should be tried. There should be a common understanding of the separation between alcohol and driving.

I pay tribute to the people who are seldom recognised —local authority road safety officers. The Institute of Road Safety Officers, the County Surveyors Society and people in the metropolitan authorities and London boroughs deal every day with the consequences of the way in which people use the roads. They also deal with the consequences of inadequate sums of money being spent to ensure that through traffic is on through roads, and that local roads are preserved for residents, pedestrians and cyclists.

In my time at the Northern Ireland Office, we managed to reduce the casualty rate by raising awareness of what people can do—primarily, by dealing with drink driving, but also by considering other road users. We were not able to spend much quickly on traffic calming—the mogadons for the motorist, to pick up a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen).

We need to continue to talk about what can be done by road engineers, which depends on analysis, and by vehicle manufacturers, which depends on the engineers. We need to go on representing people's interests, whether pedestrians, cyclists, motor cyclists, car drivers or people on buses.

Most of all, we must provide opportunities for the media to continue to make sure that people realise what they can do—belt up their child in the back seat, make sure that anyone in the back of the car has a seat belt on, so that one does not have a "flying grannie", and be a host who provides only alcohol-free drinks to drivers.

We need that kind of social pressure so that people who intend to drive know that they are not expected to drink alcohol and possible passengers decline to get into a car when they know that the driver has been drinking. Drivers must decide in advance whether to drink or to drive.

The hon. Member for Deptford made an excellent speech. My hon. Friend the Minister put forward a good framework and strategy and made a speech which, I hope, will live on in the road casualty reduction debates in the House. We can tell how important this subject is when the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott) says that the Government are not doing enough. Many people are fed up with the way in which the hon. Gentleman appears like an ambulance chaser at every kind of traffic disaster. His interests should be directed towards the 5,300 people a year who die on our roads, because their lives are important, their families matter and the subject is important.

2.11 pm

Mr. Derek Conway (Shrewsbury and Atcham): My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) delivered a long speech, but one of the most informative that I have heard. My one regret is that it was delivered to the House on a rather quiet Friday afternoon at around 2 o'clock, rather than to a busier House at 9 o'clock in the evening because many hon. Members would have listened to his speech with great interest.

I hesitate to arbitrate between my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham and my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mr. Mills) about the depth of tyre grooves. If any of my constituents are hauled before the courts on a tyre charge, I will refer them to my hon. Friends for advice before they appear before the magistrates.

I was particularly interested in what my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham said about casualties among foot travellers. Seventeen years ago I had the misfortune to knock down a five-year-old with my car and I still vividly recall the sickening thud on the nearside as the child hit the vehicle. I wholeheartedly concur with all that my hon. Friend said about making vehicles more pedestrian friendly. Fortunately, that accident occurred at the quiet time of 5 pm on a housing estate. I was driving a new car. The child saw its mother coming across a field from a bus and ran out to meet her. I am relieved to say that the child survived. The accident was witnessed by about 20 people and obviously we were all distressed about it, not least the mother, who saw the accident take place. Fortunately, for the child and for me, the car was less than a month old, so its brakes and tyres were shipshape. Because the accident occurred at 5 clock in the afternoon, there was no question of drink driving being involved—nor, I hope, would there ever be. It brought home to me the fact that one must always be ready for the unexpected. Whatever regulations the House may make, whatever advertisements may appear on television, the fact is that that child ran out into the road on seeing its mother. My father insisted that I get back into the car and drive it immediately, which was probably one of the more sensible things that he did as I doubt whether I would otherwise have driven again after such a hideous experience.

For many people in this place, this has been a week in which personal ambitions have been paraded at some depth. The question has been whether to hang on to change or to go. My personal ambition is not political; I should like to make sure that I do not outlive my wife and children, as there can be nothing worse than trying to come to terms with losing a child by whatever means.

I very much welcome the use of Government expenditure on television advertising, not necessarily for more partisan subjects such as shares and the denationalisation of companies, but for road safety and I hope that the Opposition will never criticise that expenditure. Many hon. Members will have seen the current advertisement showing an empty school room to point out how many children would have been there if accidents had not occurred. I hope to see many more such advertisements as we cannot promote that line often enough.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) successfully introduced a Bill making it compulsory for children to wear seat belts and that measure has achieved a great deal. However, as a father of three, I find that every time we get into the car there is an argument about the need to belt up. Fortunately, the eight-year-old is wholly convinced about it, but we have to watch the five-year-old like a hawk as he will always try to get away without wearing a seat belt. There is a place for regulation in these matters, but we also need more advertisements aimed not only at parents but at children, to help them understand the effect of the impact, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Eltham referred, if they are in an accident and go through the windscreen of the car. Children must be encouraged to understand the facts so that we do not have perpetual arguments between parents and children about whether to belt up.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham talked in considerable detail about motor cycles. I have mixed feelings on the matter. We should try to make them as safe as possible, but I know what I will do with my three children when they reach an age when they may be tempted to ride on the back of a motor cycle. When I was

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so tempted once in my life, it was arranged that I visit a police pathology lab. I have taken up this idea with my local police to see whether they can extend the facility to any constituent who asks for it. I shall never forget seeing, at the age of 14, a helmet with a head in it. It was, thank God, a photograph, but the range of photographic evidence taken from the most horrifying road accidents involving motor cycles cured me from that age onwards. Not only did I never want a motor cycle, but I could never be persuaded to go on the back of one. Although it was a gruesome lesson I fully intend to make my own children go through it. One cannot merely lecture children about the dangers of motor cycles—one must show them the dangers in graphic and gruesome but no doubt memorable ways. The experience had an effect on me and I wish that more of my constituents could encourage their children to see the appalling effects of motor cycle accidents in particular.

I wish to nag my hon. Friend the Minister about some constituency points. He and his officials have been patient about these matters to date, but that does not mean that I intend to stop pursuing them. The M54 runs from the M6 to mid-Wales, through my constituency, and will eventually be extended from Telford. It has been a long campaign, although that has not been the fault of the Government or of the local authority, which is controlled by a Labour-Liberal alliance, so in that sense the delay has not been the fault of any political party. It was the fault of a couple of constituents who were unhappy with the compensation arrangements and who therefore fought the issue through the courts time and again. The extension is to go ahead now, and I welcome that because it will make a huge difference to road safety on the A5. As the hon. and learned Member for Montgomery (Mr. Carlile) will know, there have been unnecessarily appalling crashes there in the past.

The present interchange between the A5 and the A49, which will soon be crossed by the M54 extension near the village of Baystonhill, is not acceptable, it will not solve any problems and it will lead to greater frustration and, consequently, to appalling driving. In the interests of road safety, that interchange must be extended.

We can be proud of the Government's record on road safety, but we know that there is still much to be done. I urge my hon. Friend to ensure that road safety education is aimed not only at adults, but at children.

2.19 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): My hon. Friend the Member for South Hams (Mr. Steen) suggested that cyclists break the law because the streets are congested. That does not explain why they go through red traffic lights or ride without front or rear lights. May I ask the Minister to do something about that? He puts out excellent press releases about cycle routes, which I support, but I should like him to say bluntly to cyclists that this behaviour will no longer do.

I should also like my hon. Friend to talk to the Deputy Assistant Commissioner at Scotland Yard and ask that, on a couple of days a week, the police do as they quite rightly do with bus lanes, which is to monitor the situation and pull people in. If they go through the streets of central London any day, they will find 50 pedal cyclists—many of them courier service cyclists—cycling the wrong way up one-way streets. That has nothing to do with traffic congestion. I hope that my hon. Friend will do something active about that because that will do far more to cut down road deaths than bringing in the nanny state and saying, "Not one drink before you drive."

2.20 pm

Ms. Ruddock: Time is against us and I, too, must be brief. We have had a good debate and there is much common ground—notably on the question of speed. Everyone has deplored the advertising of cars capable of high speeds and the Minister has a clear mandate from the House to consider further the question of speed limits—especially for certain kinds of vehicles and in certain circumstances. I hope that he will come to the House with further proposals if he cannot respond this afternoon.

I regret that the hon. Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley) ruined what would otherwise have been an excellent speech by making some unwarranted remarks about my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull, East (Mr. Prescott), who is somewhere very important and who was present for our previous debate. We argue not that Britain would be in a better position if we had adopted random breath testing already but that it is possible—we believe that there is evidence to support this view—that if we now adopted it, we could achieve a further reduction in casualties due to drink-driving which could not be achieved by any other means.

We welcome the Minister's proposals on the compulsory wearing of rear seat belts. I do not think that anyone who has rear seat belts fitted in his car will any longer hesitate to use them having heard my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith) give such a dramatic description of what happens to those sitting in the back of a vehicle if they are unsecured when a collision occurs.

There are many points to which I should have liked to refer, although many of them are simple questions on which the Minister can respond positively. There is, however, a matter on which I fear he may not respond so positively, so let me cover some of the ground again. I refer specifically to the question of small engineering works and traffic-calming methods, which many of us believe to be essential if we are to reach the Government's target for reducing road casualties. I cite in my defence the advice of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety, which has been mentioned many times:

> "PACTS believes that the implementation of local safety engineering schemes at single sites or on an area-wide basis is one of the most important routes to securing the Government's casualty reduction targets."

I remind the Minister that 95 per cent. of pedestrian casualties occur in urban areas, and that it is pedestrian and child casualties that now give us the greatest cause for concern. Per 100,000 of the population, Britain has twice the pedestrian death rate of the Netherlands, Norway, Luxembourg and Sweden. The debate has highlighted the pressing need to prioritise work on that problem.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) on his description of the parking and congestion problems in his constituency. Perhaps my hon. Friend and his constituents are being denied a solution because of the intransigence of Wandsworth borough council. In my local authority in Lewisham, there is no doubt about the means and mechanisms by which we can deal with our local problems. We have been petitioned by hundreds of

residents who have the expertise of the council to tell them precisely what kind of traffic-calming measures are required to improve local safety on the roads to which I referred earlier.

I cannot stress too much the importance that we attach to those measures to improve safety and the quality of life of our residents. The Department of Transport estimates that there is potential for at least 200 to 300 lives to be saved and around 15,000 injuries to be prevented if more local safety engineering schemes were implemented. That would be no small contribution to the targets that the Government have set themselves, and which we support. Such schemes are essential, and I urge the Minister to respond positively to our demands and assure us that Lewisham, Wandsworth and every other district that wishes to increase local safety through local engineering works will not be held back because of lack of Government support and finance.

2.25 pm

Mr. Chope: Many of us have spent the best part of five hours in the Chamber during this debate and I cannot imagine five more worthwhile hours that I have spent here. We have had a high quality debate, and I pay tribute to all the participants.

I want to respond in particular to concerns expressed by three of my hon. Friends about the tragic accident on the M42. My hon. Friends the Members for Bromsgrove (Sir H. Miller), for Meriden (Mr. Mills) and for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. King) have taken a deep interest in that accident. They were right to do so and that is consistent with the conscientious way in which they look after their constituents.

I must express regret at the accident and offer my sympathy to the families of those who have been bereaved. Obviously, I cannot discuss the cause of the accident as that is still under investigation by the police. However, I can confirm that the Department of Transport at the time of the accident already had, and still has, substantial proposals in hand for short-term and long-term improvements to the M42, as well as for the M5 and M6, around the west midlands conurbation and specifically at junction 6 of the M42.

Much comment has been made about the need for good communications. Contracts have already been let for fibre-optic cabling, improved monitors and additional cameras to provide comprehensive coverage of that part of the network by closed circuit television. The new cabling will also enable the matrix signalling and telephones to be upgraded and we are currently out to tender for the installation of new matrix signals and telephones and for the electronic equipment associated with those works.

We also have plans for sets of variable message signs at approaches to junction 6 of the M42 on both southbound and northbound carriageways to enable the central motorway police group to advise motorists of queues at the junction. Our agents have already been instructed to provide a dedicated left turn westbound on the A45 from the northbound off slip from the M42. Together with existing traffic signals at the top of that slip road activated by queue detectors, that should significantly reduce the problems of queueing on the northbound slip road at junction 6. Improved television surveillance of junction 6 will be in place within 12 months. I know that my hon. Friends would like that to happen even sooner, but it takes time to install.

The complete modernisation of the communications network for that stretch of the M42 and the M5 and the M6 around the conurbation and the dedicated slip road should be operational within two years. That is an example of the kind of investment that the Government are making in road safety. These processes were not prompted by the accident but were in hand already.

I cannot respond to all the speeches to this debate in the short time remaining to me, but I will deal with the point made by the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Ms. Ruddock). I intend to announce later this month or early next month the allocation of transport supplementary grant for the coming year. The hon. Lady probably already knows that it will be 17 per cent. higher than in the current year. I can assure her that she and everyone who wants more investment in local road safety schemes will be pleased with the outcome. My former borough of Wandsworth is one of the leaders in implementing good local road safety schemes. I am sure that, with the extra money that it will get, it will be able to go some way to meeting the points made by the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox).

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) raised a couple of detailed points. As he is present, I shall do my best to respond to one of them, and I shall write to him about the other. He referred to the reversing of lorries and the need for them to sound an audible signal. The construction and use regulations permit such devices to be fitted to all heavy goods vehicles over two tonnes. The statistics to which my hon. Friend referred were on accidents on building sites. He may like to know that the Health and Safety Executive recommends the use of reversing bleepers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eltham (Mr. Bottomley), in a superb speech, drew attention to the role of the media in our road safety campaigns. I hope that tomorrow many newspapers and television programmes will draw attention to a photograph which shows exactly what happens when a car is involved in a 30-mph collision and the way in which people sitting in the back of the vehicle are catapulted forward with tremendous adverse consequences for themselves and for the people sitting in the front.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Government Planning Policies

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Nicholas Baker.]*

2.30 pm

Mr. Ken Livingstone (Brent, East): Having been lucky enough to win the ballot after some months of trying, I wish to raise an issue affecting part of my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg). I refer to a problem which affects Kilburn high road and the streets running off it. At the end of what has been a fairly heavily political week, this is certainly not a matter of party politics and I doubt whether my hon. Friend and I will disagree about it. Certainly, the three parties on Brent council, which is a hung council, recognise that there is a major problem, and the council has recently introduced a byelaw to prevent drinking in the streets. However, I think that the real problem will be that people will cross Kilburn high road and go to my hon. Friend's constituency and continue to drink themselves silly there.

I shall begin by pointing out some appalling consequences that afflict the area and drawing on my views and the views of local residents which have been reported in the *Kilburn Times*, one of the papers that serve the local area. I shall refer to comments by people in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend. The major force behind the drive to try to resolve the problem has been the local residents association, which has taken up the issue, and the Brondesbury community association, which has corresponded with the Department of the Environment. Sheila Shannon, speaking on behalf of the Brondesbury community association, told the *Kilburn Times* that

"Kilburn is looking seedier and seedier. It's become a mecca for the hard drinkers of north west London."

In the constituency of my hon. Friend, June Perrin, chair of the Kilburn area general improvement committee, said:

"There are just too many drinking establishments in the area. The Camden side is quite bad, but in Brent they seem to hand out drink licences like toffees.

In the past year, a vet's surgery on Willesden Lane and a gas showroom on Kilburn High Road have become pubs. This area needs more amenities for the locals, not more boozers."

Mr. Lawrence Morris, the chair of the Kilburn advisory committee—once again, broadly based in my hon. Friend's constituency—has called for the establishment of a joint working party between Camden and Brent to try to combat the problems. One striking statement was by Mr. John Alexander, who runs a photo shop in Willesden lane. He describes how he has watched the number of pubs, restaurants and off-licences in the area soar and the numbers of drunks and alcoholics become an increasingly common sight in doorways. The paper states:

"'You can obtain drink on Willesden Lane 24 hours a day', Mr. Alexander said. 'Willesden Lane is 600 yards long. There are 13 drink outlets on the stretch; three are pubs, five restaurants and five off licences. One of them, a wholesalers, is open 18 hours a day and keeps its doors open all night.

There was a man stabbed to death outside the shop in a drunken brawl. I had my window smashed in and the doorway used to stink of urine all the time.'

Other shopkeepers and residents along Willesden Lane . . . . express grave misgivings about the advent of a late night dance and drink licence for the old Odeon cinema."

One local resident is quoted as saying:

"On Friday and Saturday nights I don't get to sleep until four o'clock in the morning if I'm lucky. If the cinema gets a licence as well its going to be much, much worse."

Those are the comments of people of all political persuasions.

I imagine that most people in London, including most Ministers, are used to driving along Kilburn high road to get to the A1 or M1, but that they seldom get off that road and experience local conditions. Although as one drives along that road, the area may appear devoid of residents, comprising only shops and pubs, immediately behind both sides of Kilburn high road there are family and residential communities. The area is incredibly densely populated. Parking is a monstrous problem. I used to live in the immediate area, in Kingsgate road which is off Quex road where it is virtually impossible to find a parking space at any time of the day. That is true all the time for both sides of Kilburn high road.

People are now attracted to what is regarded as the place in north London where one can drink for virtually 24 hours a day. People from all over north-west London are being drawn in and are concentrating in this area, which already has tremendous problems.

Many of the people who have been released from psychiatric hospitals into the so-called "care in the community" have ended up as derelicts, basically living on Kilburn high road and trying to get money from local passers-by so that they can buy their next drink. I have not seen anywhere in Britain where there is the same concentration of down-and-outs and derelicts in such a small area and on a major highway.

Another problem that has aggravated the state of affairs in that area is that many local traders have opted not to have the local authority collect their rubbish, but have failed to substitute for that by paying for their own rubbish collection. Some of the less reputable local businesses dump their shop rubbish on to the street. Once again, it is picked over by the down-and-outs and ends up being strewn throughout the area.

I have known the area since I was first selected to contest the Hampstead and Highgate constituency—nearly 15 years ago. It is visibly deteriorating much more sharply than almost anywhere else in the capital. That is one reason why I voted against the measures that were introduced a couple of years ago to liberalise Britain's drinking laws. It was not because I am a reactionary, but because I feared their impact on the area. Those fears have been proved well founded.

Another problem that has to be seen to be believed is the spin-off effect. Parking and congestion are absolutely monstrous. If I want to get from one end of Kilburn high road to the other, it is easier to get off the bus and walk the length of it, and then to catch up with the same bus half an hour later further down the road.

The time has come for everybody to say that something needs to be done. I am the first to accept that this is probably a purely local problem, which is not repeated on a similar scale anywhere else in the capital, and perhaps nowhere else in Britain. Introducing legislation will not, therefore, be an immediate priority for anybody, but there are things that we can do. The Brondesbury community association—which has the happy acronym of BRAT—wrote to the Secretary of State for the Environment pointing out the problems and stressing that even at the time of writing—this was back in the summer—there were outstanding applications to change the use of a whole range of properties. Number 167 to 173 Kilburn high road, which had previously provided furniture and carpeting for local residents, was subject to a planning application to

change its use into a wine bar. Number 229 Kilburn high road had previously been a cafe and restaurant, but had reopened as a pub, having gained planning permission for an enormous extension at the back, which brought it to within 8 ft of residential premises. The owners had applied for a music and dancing licence until 1 o'clock in the morning—not just once or twice a week, but every night. The major concern in the area is that the Willesden lane cinema, which has now closed, will be turned into a dance hall. It is situated on an extremely busy, dangerous and congested major traffic junction.

In the letter to the Department of the Environment, the community association expressed the two key points on which I wish to focus. One was that two years ago there was a change in the way in which these matters were dealt with. The letter states:

"Since the 'Use Class Order (A3) was changed some 2 years ago by the Secretary of State for the Environment, planning permission for take-aways, restaurants, wine bars and public houses are now all placed in the same category. The knock-on effect of this is that premises which are currently treated as take-aways can, overnight, turn into a pub—provided they can obtain a liquor licence."

I know that for some time there has been a dispute between the parties about the severity of planning regulations, and that the Government have won three elections while being committed to trying to do what they can about changing planning legislation to encourage the maximum development of economic activity. I do not think that the impact on Kilburn could have been foreseen when the change was made, and I hope that we can reconsider the matter.

The second problem is not within the remit of the Department of the Environment, but I am sure that that Department is in contact with the Home Office. It is the question of the liquor licensing authority. Licensing in Brent seems to be substantially more liberal than in other areas and does not take account of the area's needs. There already seems to be an oversaturation of drinking premises, but that does not seem to be taken by the licensing authority as an argument against opening more.

In a generally helpful and positive reply to the assocation, Tony Blake of the development control policy division raised two or three points with which I take issue. His letter states:

"Development control decisions should not, however, take account of possible antisocial or criminal behaviour of customers or visitors to a particular development."

In a general sense, one agrees with that, but that bold approach places an impossible social pressure on a small and densely populated residential area.

In certain cases I should like to see the Government giving guidance in a circular to say that such considerations could be made in the application of development control. The letter continued:

"Such considerations can nevertheless be taken into account in the content of an application for a liquor licence, . . . You also express concern at the greater flexibility offered to premises providing food and drink to the public by the A3 class of the Use Classes Order 1987. This class reflects trends in the modern catering trade, where many establishments (particularly 'fast food' outlets) combine restaurant and take-away facilities. It enables the catering trade to adapt to changing demands with greater certainty, in premises where the environmental nuisances such as smell, traffic and parking have already been accepted."

I make it quite clear that those things have never been accepted. They are getting worse and are now becoming intolerable and a health hazard.

My final point at issue is where the letter states:

"Changes of use from retail use to food and drink use remain subject to planning control, and it is open to local authorities to . . . restrict such changes of use in more than a certain proportion of premises in a shopping area . . . However, the question whether any particular non-retail use is already sufficiently represented in any shopping area is a matter of commercial judgment and will not be material to a planning application."

That is wrong. A few years ago there was a bipartisan approach in London when Lady Porter of Westminster council and I, together with the London boroughs, supported a change in the law about sex shops. I doubt whether Lady Porter and I could find a single nice thing to say about each other in any circumstances, but we recognised that the growth of sex shops in Westminster was completely destroying the social fabric of the area. After pressure, legislation was passed which said that that could be a consideration and there has been a dramatic decline. We must not say simply because profits can be made that a permanent alcoholic watering hole in Kilburn which serves the whole of north-west London and which the market can sustain, should be allowed to continue. I ask the Minister to consider these positive changes.

There are two other changes that have been well thought out by Gwen Molloy, who was a member of the licensing authority for some years. She has suggested that those who serve on the licensing authority and determine whether liquor licences should be granted should be drawn from the area for which they are dealing. In Brent, only four of the 20 members of the licensing authority live in the area. It is important that those who serve upon it should know and understand the problems of the area.

Gwen Molloy has suggested also that the licensing authority should consider the overall needs of the area, which means that individual licences should not be judged in isolation. It would be useful if the Government suggested that such consideration should take place in a circular or in a note of guidance to licensing authorities.

This is not a party issue. I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate will be taking part in the debate. I hope that, following the debate the Government, local authorities and the local Members can meet to ascertain precisely what can be done to tackle a terrible problem.

2.45 pm

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg (Hampstead and Highgate): I should make it clear for both our sakes that, while the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and I are friends, we are not, in the terms of the House, hon. Friends. The hon. Gentleman might face more danger than I if others thought that he and I were political friends.

I agree strongly with almost everything that the hon. Member for Brent, East says. As a result of the conditions that he has described, the entire area becomes sleazy, a situation contributed to on the Camden side by the most appalling failure of the Camden authorities to clear street refuse quickly enough. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has issued a direction to Camden to re-tender the system as it is clearly in total collapse. I can understand traders who want to keep a fairly clean ship, as it were, asking private collectors to clear the rubbish because the authority will not clear it, but that is a sad state of affairs.

The Order Paper tells us that the debate is about "planning policies". An extra problem in Camden—I do not know whether it applies to Brent, and it may not—is

[Sir Geoffrey Finsberg]

a bad failure to deal with enforcement. It takes months to persuade the authority to follow anything up. The plea may be shortage of legal staff, but that can be easily overcome by giving a straightforward job to an outside firm of solicitors. Local residents are becoming very unhappy at the way in which people flout existing planning laws. They go ahead and hope that they will not be found out. If they are found out, it takes months to get the matter on the agenda of the planning committee and months follow thereafter before any action is taken.

I give broad support to what has been said by the hon. Member for Brent, East. I suppose that another reason why Ministers and members of the shadow Cabinet travel along Kilburn high street is that they do not wish to see the very large poster outside my headquarters stating that I am there to give advice which they would see if they used the Finchley road.

2.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment (Mr. Robert Atkins) *rose——*

Mr. Nicholas Baker (Dorset, North): Hear, hear.

Mr. Atkins: Such support gives me further strength to congratulate the hon. Member for Brent, East, (Mr. Livingstone) on winning a place in the ballot and securing the opportunity to raise what I recognise, from the manner in which he has addressed the subject, is a matter of considerable concern to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir G. Finsberg). Although the hon. Gentleman has not been a Member of this place for as long as my hon. Friend, I know that in his former incarnation he was familiar with Brent. I know also that he speaks with great authority on these matters. I am impressed by what he has to say.

The town and country planning system exists to reconcile the need for essential development with the need to protect the amenity of a locality in the public interest. The relevant legislation requires those who determine development proposals to do so having regard to the local development plan and any other material planning considerations.

Such considerations are likely to include the appearance of the proposed development, its siting—especially its likely impact on neighbouring residential development, schools and hospitals—traffic generation, parking requirements, noise and disturbance. It would not be proper, however, for planning decisions about lawful forms of development to take into account the possibility that customers or visitors to a particular development might behave in an anti-social or criminal manner.

The planning system recognises that the use of premises for food-and-drink type activities can give rise to particular problems. That is why planning permission has to be obtained before such uses are introduced into premises which have not been used previously for that purpose. It provides a mechanism for controlling the overall number of food and drink outlets in a particular area, but once a planning permission has been granted for such a use the precise nature of the outlet should be a matter for commercial judgment.

Since 1987 the use classes order has included a food and drink use class—class A3—which covers restaurants, cafes, wine bars, public houses, take-aways and other premises used for the sale of food and drink for consumption on the premises or of hot food for consumption of the premises. The inclusion of a food and drink class reflects trends in the modern catering industry, where many of the traditional boundaries between different types of premises have broken down, for example, in fast-food outlets and pubs encouraging use by families. It enables the catering trade to adapt to changing demands with greater certainty, in premises where the environmental nuisances, such as smell, traffic and parking, have already been accepted. If the order took into account all the potential differences between broadly similar uses, it would become so detailed as to be of little practical value.

Despite what I have just said, however, we acknowledge the need to assess the overall impact of the Use Classes Order 1987 now that it has been in force for over three years. Accordingly, early this year my Department commissioned independent research into the effects of the changes which were made to the order in 1987. Amongst other things, this research will cover the impact on amenity and the environment of the food and drink use class. I expect to receive shortly the report of the research contractors.

In summary, from the perspective of land use planning, the impact on local amenity and the environment of changes of use within a particular use class is designed to be neutral. However, there are other considerations to be taken into account. The land use planning system should not seek to secure objectives available under other legislation. For example, the likelihood of any anti-social behaviour arising from the opening of a public house should properly be considered under licensing rather than under planning control. Naturally, it is for the police to take steps to prevent or curtail unlawful activities. As the hon. Gentleman recognised, the law as it relates to the granting of liquor licences is a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

A local resident concerned about noise and disturbance caused by late-night entertainment can ask the local authority to attach a condition to the entertainment licence imposing an earlier closing time. Alternatively, under the Licensing Act 1964, a resident could oppose the renewal of a liquor licence or apply for its revocation at any licensing session. The hon. Gentleman's points about licences in Brent, as he well understands, are for the legal side of the Government rather than for me. The thought of having to consider an adjustment to the magistracy daunts me, so I am more than happy to leave it to other Ministers.

Greater regulation of licensed premises through the planning system would not necessarily resolve the type of problems which the hon . Gentleman has raised. As one who at the time was impressed by the need to reform the licensing laws, I take issue with him on the philosophy behind that. However, I understand only too well his concerns. Arguably, it is preferable for people wishing to enjoy a drink to have a wide choice of venue; overcrowded conditions in a limited number of outlets may well give rise to an overflow of customers on to the streets which might produce a different set of problems.

The planning system must play a positive role by facilitating where possible the provision of facilities in response to demand, as well as preventing development in particular locations where, on the basis of land use planning criteria, it is clearly inappropriate.

Local planning authorities have a key role to play in this process, not only by exercising their development control powers, but also by drawing up local plans which are relevant to the needs and characteristics of their areas, thus providing a sound framework for individual development control decisions. I understand that the London borough of Brent is preparing its unitary development plan. I am sure that the council will wish to take into account the views of local residents, and what the hon. Gentleman has said today must count strongly when it considers the planning policies to be included in that document.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at six minutes to Three o'clock.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 8 November 1990

DEFENCE

Cash Limits

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will announce changes to the defence cash limits and running costs limit for 1990-91.

Mr. Bright: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will announce any changes to the defence cash limits and running costs limit for 1990-91.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made:

(1) Defence Cash Limits

£000s

Class and Vote	*Current Cash Limit*	*Increase*	*Revised Cash Limit*
I, 1	8,968,295	40,000	9,008,295
I, 2	8,531,208	213,389	8,744,597

These changes, which increase the block defence cash limit by £253,389,000 from £21,332,060,000 to £21,585,449,000, reflect the full take-up of entitlement to carry-forward of capital underspending under the end-year flexibility scheme (announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990, *Official Report*, columns *235-40*) and additional costs being incurred on the defence budget as a result of the crisis in the Gulf.

The changes also take account of a decrease of £114,799,000 to compensate for an overspend on class I, votes 1, 2, 4 and 5, in 1989-90. This follows the normal practice of reducing the limit for one financial year by the amount of any overspend in the previous year.

(2) Running Costs Limit.

The running costs limit for the Department will be increased by £40,000,000 from £5,232,678,000 to £5,272,678,000. This reflects additional running costs being incurred on the defence budget as a result of the crisis in the Gulf.

The increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Security

Mr. Patrick Thompson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will publish a statement of the Government's security policy in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: I have today placed copies of a statement of the Government's security policy in Northern Ireland in the Library and the Vote Office. The text is as follows:

THE GOVERNMENT'S SECURITY POLICY IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Constitutional Position

1. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom because that is the will of the majority of people who live there. It will not cease to be a part of the United Kingdom unless that situation changes. Majority desire for a change in status clearly does not exist at present. There is no reason to expect this to alter in the foreseeable future.

Aims and Objectives

2. The Government's aims are:

(a) to maintain the rule of law;

(b) to ensure that all the people of Northern Ireland are free to express their political opinions without inhibition, fear of discrimination or reprisal;

(c) to defend the democratically expressed wishes of the people of Northern Ireland against those who try to promote political objectives, including a change in the status of Northern Ireland, by violence or the threat of violence;

(d) to create in Northern Ireland the conditions for a just, peaceful and prosperous society in which local people can exercise greater control over their own affairs.

3. So that these aims can be achieved, it is the first priority of the Government in Northern Ireland to eradicate terrorism, from whichever section of the community it comes. There is no acceptable level of violence and, for so long as violence continues, it will be met with a firm and resolute response.

Strategy

4. To this end, the Government will:

(a) ensure that the police, supported by the armed forces, have the resources they need to undertake their difficult and dangerous work on behalf of the whole community;

(b) provide a legal framework within which the security forces can act to defeat terrorism;

(c) co-operate closely on security with the Government of the Republic of Ireland;

(d) seek to isolate the terrorists from the communities within which they operate.

5. The Government will implement this strategy with total commitment until terrorism has been defeated in Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.

6. In parallel, the Government will implement effective measures in the political, social and economic fields, designed to promote equality of treatment, economic well-being and stable democratic institutions. These measures will help to create a climate in Northern Ireland in which peaceful political development can take place, thereby complementing and reinforcing the Government's security strategy.

7. In accordance with this strategy, which is endorsed by the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the General Officer Commanding the Armed Forces in Northern Ireland:

(a) the Government are determined that terrorism will be defeated through the evenhanded and energetic enforcement of the criminal law.

(b) The police will continue to take primary responsibility for the prevention, investigation and securing evidence for the prosecution of crime, including terrorist crime. The armed forces will act in support of the police, but only where and when the security situation makes it necessary.

(c) Wherever and whenever possible, the police will operate without military support, in accordance with the goal of restoring normality, and with the ultimate aim that all military support to the police should be dispensed with when the security situation permits.

(d) Anti-terrorist legislation will be kept under review, to ensure that it is appropriate to the prevailing security threat. It will continue to strike a balance between providing the RUC and armed forces with the legal means they need in order to protect the community effectively, and at the same time providing appropriate safeguards for individuals. When the need for a particular provision no longer exists, it will be repealed or allowed to lapse, as a step towards greater reliance on the ordinary criminal law.

(e) The police and armed forces will continue to be governed by the legal principle of using only such force as is reasonable in the circumstances in preventing crime and arresting offenders.

(f) Members of the police and armed forces, like all other citizens, will continue to be subject to the law. If members of the security forces break the law they will themselves be liable to prosecution.

(g) The public have a right to expect the highest standards of behaviour from police officers and members of Her Majesty's forces. Activity or actions falling short of those standards will never be condoned. The Government hope that anyone who believes that they have a genuine cause for complaint about the conduct of a police officer or member of the armed forces will use the procedures which exist for the investigation of such complaints.

8. The Government recognise that, to be fully effective, the actions of the police and armed forces against terrorism in Northern Ireland require the support of all sides of the community. The actions of the security forces must, therefore, at all times be such as to create and maintain confidence in their integrity and professionalism, as well as in their operational effectiveness.

9. The Government call on men and women of good will from both traditions in Northern Ireland to co-operate with the security forces as they carry out their duty to protect the community. Such co-operation may include accepting the inconvenience which may result from security force operations against terrorists and reporting crime, including terrorist crime, to the police.

10. The Government believe that confidence between the community and the police and armed forces can best be achieved if both traditions are properly represented in the locally recruited forces. Hence the Government believe that all those who recognise the importance of building and retaining that confidence have a duty to encourage members of both traditions to co-operate with and to join those forces.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Cash Limits

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has any changes to announce to the 1990-91 running costs limit for the Government Actuary's Department.

Mr. Maples: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the running costs limit for class XVIII, vote 15 will be increased by £60,000 from £3,099,000 to £3,159,000 to provide for new work on insurance supervision on behalf of the Department of Trade and Industry.

The cost of this increase will be recovered from Department of Trade and Industry on repayment and the cash limit for the vote is therefore unchanged.

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any changes are proposed in the cash limit and running costs limit for 1990-91 for the Inland Revenue.

Mr. Maude: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XVIII, vote 7 will be increased by £26,032,000 from £1,377,913,000 to £1,403,945,000 and the Department's running cost limit by £11,032,000 from £1,316,363,000 to £1,327,395,000. The increase in running costs reflects the take up of end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990, *Official Report*, columns *235-40*, (£4,987,000), a transfer of £45,000 from the Department of Social Security (administration and miscellaneous) vote (class XIV vote 7) for a computer project setting up a register of pension schemes, and £6,000,000 for publicity consequent on the decision to introduce new arrangements for the taxation of bank and building society interest in 1991-92. The increase in the cash limit also includes £15,000,000 for capital expenditure on accommodation for staff required to operate the new bank and building society arrangements. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he is proposing any change to the Central Statistical Office's cash limit or running costs limit for 1990-91.

Mr. Maples: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XVIII vote 13 will be increased by £1,079,000 from £27,394,000 to £28,473,000 and the running costs limit by £1,018,000 from £21,439,000 to £22,457,000. The increase primarily reflects provision for the package of measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 17 May 1990, *Official Report*, column 484, to improve the quality of the statistics produced by the CSO in three areas—services, companies and balance of payments. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any changes are proposed in the cash limit and running cost limit for 1990-91 for Customs and Excise.

Mr. Ryder: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class

XVIII, vote 6 will be increased by £6,936,000 from £640,926,000 to £647,862,000 and the running cost limit for Customs and Excise by £2,722,000 from £573,077,000 to £575,799,000. The increase in the running cost limit arises from the take-up of full end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990, *Official Report*, columns *235-40*, and the costs associated with a programme for the training of overseas customs officers, which are being met from receipts from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (class II, vote 1), the Home Office (class IX, vote 3), and the Overseas Development Administration (class II, vote 5). The increase in the cash limit includes take-up of the full end-year flexibility entitlement for capital expenditure as well as increased legal costs. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

CIVIL SERVICE

Cash Limits

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Minister for the Civil Service if there are any proposals to change the 1990-91 cash limit and the running costs limit for the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service.

Mr. Mellor: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for the Office of the Minister for the Civil Service (class XIX, vote 1) will be increased by £662,000 from £43,621,000 to £44,283,000. The increase will be offset by a reduction in the cash limit for the Cabinet Office: other services (class XIX, vote 2).

The increase is required to cover the cost of providing financial support to other Government Departments in respect of their secondees to European Community institutions; the salary costs of staff specifically recruited to increase future British representation in European Community institutions; the cost of an efficiency unit study of ministerial correspondence; the cost of repairing storm damage to the Civil Service College's premises at Sunningdale Park and the bringing forward of some capital expenditure from the college's 1991-92 building programme. In addition, receipts of interest on loans to the Civil Service Sports Council are to be reclassified from appropriations in aid to extra receipts payable to the Consolidated Fund.

Some of the above changes in provision have a consequent effect on the Department's running costs limit which will be increased by £142,000 from £33,722,000 to £33,864,000.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Cash Limits

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether any changes will be made to his Department's cash limit and running cost limits for 1990-91.

Mr. Lilley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class IV, vote 2 (support for industry, international trade, statutory and regulatory work, consumer protection, and administration) will be increased by £14,304,000 from £787,377,000 to £801,681,000. The running costs limit for the Department of Trade and Industry will be reduced by £470,000 from £304,234,000 to £303,764,000.

The increase in the cash limit covers a rise in grant-in-aid provision for the English Industrial Estates Corporation from a token £1,000 to £24,758,000 to compensate for a shortfall in income caused by a rescheduling of asset sales. It also covers an increase of £4,686,000 in departmental capital expenditure for full take-up of the end-year flexibility entitlements announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July, columns *235-38*, an increase of £3,000,000 in capital expenditure at the National Engineering Laboratory, increased export promotion expenditure of £5,677,000 partially offset by increased receipts of £1,900,000, increased contributions to the general agreement on tariffs and trade and the International Customs Tariff Bureau of £123,000 made necessary by exchange rate movements, an increase in provision of £3,043,000 to pay for more investigations under the Companies Act and to publicise legislation under the Consumer Protection Act, an increase of £36,000 to reflect a transfer of responsibility from the Department of the Environment for advice provided by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux on the community charge, and provision of £120,000 for ex-gratia payments to investors in Kingfisher and Dixons following the early release of the Kingfisher/Dixons takeover report. There is also a requirement to offset a shortfall of £500,000 in receipts in relation to contributions to the Universal Postal Union.

These additions are partially offset by reductions of £17,000,000 in respect of collaborative research, £5,000,000 in respect of exceptional projects, £2,000,000 for the inner cities initiative, £1,000,000 for the consultancy initiatives, £500,000 for consultancies and formal inquiries, in all cases reflecting currently expected levels of demand, and £143,000 for publicity. Running costs provision has been reduced by £15,000 and programme provision reduced by £80,000 to reflect the transfer of responsibility to the Overseas Development Administration for the International Tropical Timber Organisation. There is a take-up of £217,000 of the £1,524,000 end-year flexibility entitlement on running costs announced on 25 July, cols *235-38*. This is offset completely by a delayed reduction in gross running cost provision as a result of the transfer of certain central staff to the Radiocommunications Agency, which is exempt from gross running cost control. A further reduction of £455,000 reflecting an expected increase in VAT refunds on contracted-out services gives an overall reduction in the running costs limit of £470,000. The increase in VAT receipts is wholly offset by reductions in other receipts for central and miscellaneous services.

In addition, the opportunity is being taken to transfer £200,000 of provision between capital expenditure subheads of vote 2 in respect of work being contracted out by the Department on behalf of Companies House executive agency. An increase in expenditure of £817,000 at the Radiocommunications Agency is being fully matched by increased receipts.

These changes are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

In addition, a supplementary estimate of £4,692,000 is to be sought for class, IV vote 4, Export Credits Guarantee Department: Administration. The cash limit will be increased by £4,692,000 from £40,749,000 to £45,441,000, and the running costs limit by £4,692,000 from £38,800,000 to £43,492,000. This expenditure is not included in the planning total. The supplementary is required to meet additional running costs arising from work to prepare for the privatisation of ECGD's short-term credit insurance operation, announced to the House on 18 December 1989. It was announced in the Gracious Speech that a Bill is to be introduced in the current Session.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Cash Limits

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether any changes are proposed in the cash limits for the intervention board executive agency.

Mr. Gummer: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class III, vote 2 (administration) will be increased by £5,009,000 from £37,508,000 to £42,517,000. Within this limit running costs including VAT recovery will be increased by £1,257,000 from £22,091,000 to £23,348,000; capital will be increased by £586,000 of which £304,000 is in respect of end-of-year flexibility as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990, *Official Report*, columns *235-38*; agency services will be increased by £3,286,000, and appropriation-in-aid, excluding VAT recovery on running costs, will be increased by £120,000. These increases in administration costs reflect the substantial growth in CAP market support activity, primarily in respect of beef intervention, the initial costs of relocating part of the agency to Newcastle, and take up of the capital end-year flexibility entitlement.

Agriculture Council

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the outcome of the meeting of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 5 and 6 November.

Mr. Gummer: I represented the United Kingdom at this meeting together with my hon. Friend the Minister for Trade.

Agreement was reached on a text specifying possible reductions in agricultural support and protection in the context of the current GATT round. This is now being put on the table in Geneva.

The text agreed makes only three relatively small changes from that originally proposed by the Commission and if, following negotiations in GATT, its proposals were put into effect, they would represent a significant liberalisation of agricultural markets and trade. A Council statement on the method of implementing the reductions in support and on any accompanying measures which may be adopted as a consequence was also agreed. This fully protects the United Kingdom's right to insist upon measures which are even-handed between member states and between individuals.

Agreement was also reached on the adaptations to the common agricultural policy necessary following German reunification.

TRANSPORT

Cash Limits

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes he proposes to make to the 1990-91 cash limit and running costs limit for his Department.

Mr. Parkinson: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limits in class VII will be changed as follows:

£ thousand

Class and vote	*Current cash limit*	*Changes end year flexibility (a) Capital*	*running costs*	*Other*	*Revised cash limit*
VII, 1	1,808,062	—	—	−9,200 (b)	1,798,862
2	253,236	2,000	524	3,933 (c)	259,693
4	132,909	2,000	659	228 (d)	135,796
5	267,518	—	—	1 (e)	267,519

(a) Take-up of entitlements announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990, *Official Report*, columns. *235-40*.

(b) Decreases of £7,000,000 in respect of a transfer to the Department of the Environment non voted cash limit DOE/UA for costs incurred by the Black Country development corporation in acquiring land for the black country spine road and £2,200,000 transferred to class VII vote 2 for transport safety campaigns.

(c) Increases of £853,000 to repay accrued interest on compensation awarded to the United Kingdom in respect of the Amoco Cadiz oil pollution incident; and of £750,000 to meet the cost of dealing with the Rosebay oil pollution incident in May 1990. The Rosebay costs are expected to be recoverable in due course. There is also £358,000 transferred from the Department of the Environment (class VIII vote 8) in respect of certain running costs.

(d) An increase of £228,000 transferred from class VII vote 2 to cover certain staff-related costs transferred from my Department to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency.

(e) Token. Provision has been made to enable certain payments in respect of transport facilities grants to be made direct to the private sector.

The running costs limit of the Department of Transport has been increased by £1,515,000 from £320,901,000 to £322,416,000.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Crossrail, London

Sir John Wheeler: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he has taken to safeguard the east-west crossrail.

Mr. Freeman: Initial safeguarding directions under the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988 have been made. These came into force on 5

November. London Underground and British Rail will be consulting those affected. If need be the initial directions will be amended in the light of those consultations.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Cash Limits

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made in 1990-91 cash limits for expenditure by the Overseas Development Administration.

Mrs. Chalker: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit on the overseas aid vote (class II vote 5) will be increased by £5,855,000 from £1,471,654,000 to £1,477,509,000. The increase provides for the estimated costs in 1990-91 of the establishment of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development in London. This provision is additional to and separate from the resources for the official overseas aid programme for developing countries. The running costs limit for the ODA has also been increased by £305,000 from £33,109,000 to £33,414,000. These increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

PRIME MINISTER

Cash Limits

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if there are any proposals to change the 1990-91 cash limit for the Cabinet Office: other services.

The Prime Minister: The cash limit for the Cabinet Office: other services (class XIX, vote 2) will be reduced by £662,000 from £21,918,000 to £21,256,000. This reflects the reprofiling of the timetable of a major capital project. Expenditure will now fall in later years. The decrease offsets an increase in the cash limit of the Cabinet Office: OMCS (class XIX, vote 1) of £662,000 for which a supplementary estimate has been submitted.

EMPLOYMENT

Disabled People

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what arrangements have been made to publish the evaluation of his Department's special schemes for people with disabilities, as promised in paragraph 6.23 of the consultative document, "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities".

Mr. Howard: I published the evaluation on 2 November and placed copies in the Library. Copies have been sent to all parties who were on the original distribution list for the consultative document which include organisations of and for people with disabilities. Comments are invited by 1 February 1991, particularly on the issues of priorities in future expenditure, the balance between employers' and the Government's contribution to costs and the help available under the schemes to people with disabilities in self-employment.

Cash Limits

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment whether any changes will be made to his Department's cash limits or running costs limits for 1990-91.

Mr. Jackson: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 1 (training and enterprise programmes) will be reduced by £14,970,000 from £2,467,308,000 to £2,452,338,000. This is the net effect of a token £1,000 estimate; of increased provision of £1,159,000 (running costs) and £2,000,000 (capital costs) for full take-up of end-year flexibility for both capital and running costs as announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990, *Official Report*, cols. *236-39;* of a decrease of £2,500,000 to offset the increase sought on class VI, vote 4; of the transfer of £15,279,000 to the employment service in connection with the transfer of the employment rehabilitation service; and a decrease of £350,000 in connection with the transfer of responsibility for the North London school of physiotherapy to the Department of Health.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 2 (other programmes and central services), will be increased by £372,000 from £213,825,000 to £214,197,000. This is the net effect of an increase of £486,000 for full take-up of running costs end-year flexibility entitlement announced on 25 July; an increase of £6,000 from class III, vote 4 to fund the inclusion of agriculture and horticulture in the small firms loan guarantee scheme and a decrease of £120,000 to offset the increase sought on class VI, vote 4.

The cash limit for class VI, vote 3 (Employment Service), will be increased by £21,328,000 from £393,976,000 to £415,304,000. This increase is partly offset by a reduction in the cash limit on class VI, vote 1. The increase is the result of the transfer of £15,279,000 in connection with the transfer of the employment rehabilitation service from the Training Agency (class VI, vote 1) and an increase of £2,725,000 (running costs) and £3,324,000 (capital costs) for full take-up of running costs end-year flexibility entitlement and part take-up of capital end-year flexibility entitlement announced on 25 July.

The cash limit on class VI, vote 4 (Health and Safety Commission and Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) will be increased by £2,620,000 from £134,591,000 to £137,211,000. This is the net effect of increased provision of £2,500,000 for running costs for the Health and Safety Commission (subhead A1 of class VI, vote 4), offset by a corresponding decrease on class VI, vote 1; and an increase of £120,000 for the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (subhead A2 of class VI, vote 4) for arbitrators' fees and exhibitions, offset by a corresponding decrease on class VI, vote 2.

The running costs limit for the Department of Employment (votes 1, 2 and 3) will be increasing by £1,870,000 from £914,397,000 to £916,267,000.

The running costs limit for subhead A1 of class VI, vote 4 (Health and Safety Commission) will increase by £2,500,000 from £98,121,000 to £100,621,000.

These increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement.

WALES

Cash Limits

Mr. Gwilym Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he proposes to make any changes to the cash limits for class XVI, votes 5, 8 and 10, and for WO/LACAP and WO/UA in the current year.

Mr. David Hunt: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limit on class XVI, vote 5 is being increased by £7,586,000, from £317,825,000 to £325,411,000; the cash limit on class XVI, vote 8 is being increased by £14,207,000, from £962,838,000 to £977,045,000; the cash limit on class XVI, vote 10 is being increased by £5,475,000, from £1,604,300,000 to £1,609,775,000; the cash limit for WO/LACAP is being increased by £10,400,000, from £357,188,000 to £367,588,000 and the cash limit for WO/UA is being increased by £2,792,000, from £67,112,000 to £69,904,000.

The increase on vote 5 relates to the take-up of full end-year flexibility entitlement on capital expenditure (£7,651,000) as announced by the Chief Secretary on 25 July 1990 at columns *235-38*, partly offset by a reduction of £65,000 in respect of a contribution to be made to the Department of Health for the Peto institute. The Department of Health will take a corresponding increase to class XIII, vote 3.

The increase to vote 8 takes account of the termination of VAT refunds (£10,480,000), additional expenditure for the senior nurses pay award (£82,000), an increase to general medical costs (2,749,000) and the take-up of full end-year flexibility entitlement on capital expenditure (£896,000) as announced by the Chief Secretary on 25 July 1990.

The increase to vote 10 is in respect of block grant payable to local authorities as compensation under section 67 of the Local Government, Planning and Land Act 1980.

The increase to the local authority capital cash limit (WO/LACAP) takes account of additional provision for home renovation grants.

The increase to the urban aid capital cash limit (WO/UA) takes account of the take-up of full end-year flexibility entitlement on capital expenditure (£2,792,000) as announced by the Chief Secretary on 25 July 1990.

These increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Cash Limits

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes have been made to the class X, vote 12, cash limit and running costs limit for the Public Record Office.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class X, vote 12 will be increased by £571,000 from £19,823,000 to £20,394,000. This increase will be charged to the reserve and will not add to the planned total of public expenditure. The increase arises partly as a result of additional costs incurred in respect of a VAT surcharge and improved security measures. The running cost limit for the Public Record Office will as a result be increased by £292,000 from £16,462,000 to £16,754,000.

The increase in the cash limit will also enable the Public Record Office to meet the cost of planned capital works originally provided for in 1989-90 in class XX, vote II, but which have slipped into 1990-91. Of the increase £279,000 comes into end-of-year flexibility arrangements as announced to the House of Commons by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990 at columns *236-38*.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes have been made to the class X, vote 3, cash limit and running costs limit for the Northern Ireland court service.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class X, vote 3 has been increased by £3,180,000 from £16,360,000 to £19,540,000 and the running costs limit by £200,000 from £12,606,000 to £12,806,000. This increase has been charged to the reserve and will not add to the planned total of public expenditure. The increases arise because of additional costs incurred in respect of bomb damage to court buildings, extra security staff, judicial removals and legal representation at coroners' inquests. Additional appropriations-in-aid of £200,000 will offset the increase in the running costs limit.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Mr. Carrington: To ask the Attorney-General whether any changes have been made to the class X, vote 9, cash limit and running costs limit for the Treasury Solicitors Department.

The Attorney-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class X, vote 9, will be increased by £1,508,000 from £14,354,000 to £15,862,000 and the running costs limit by £1,558,000 from £15,334,000 to £16,892,000.

The increase is required as a result of improved recruitment and retention of staff.

The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police and Criminal Evidence Act

Mr. Hind: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the revised codes of practice made under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 come into force.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend's intention was to bring the codes into force on 1 January 1991. In order to make some small amendments to the codes, however, and to give the police more time for training, we have today laid a fresh set of draft codes before Parliament and plan to bring them into force on 1 April 1991.

Cash Limits

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he intends to make any changes to the 1990-91 cash limits within his responsibilities and to his Department's running costs limit.

Mr. Waddington: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit on class IX, vote 3, Home Office administration, immigration and police support services, England and Wales, will be reduced by £257,000 from £758,925,000 to £758,668,000. This is caused by the transfer of responsibility for the new drugs demand reduction task force to the Department of Health.

In consequence of this transfer of responsibility, the Home Office running costs limit will be reduced by £242,000 from £1,012,659,000 to £1,012,417,000.

ENERGY

Cash Limits

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any changes will be made to the Office of Electricity Regulation's cash limit for 1990-91.

Mr. Wakeham: The Director General of the Office of Electricity Regulation is accountable for this vote; I understand that the following changes will be made.

The cash limit for class V, vote 8 relating to expenditure by the Office of Electricity Regulation will be reduced by £300,000 from £12,135,000 to £11,835,000 mainly due to a planned slower build-up of staff numbers than originally forecast. The running cost limit will be reduced by £300,000 from £8,455,000 to £8,155,000.

Mr. Dickens: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any changes will be made to his Department's cash limits for 1990-91.

Mr. Wakeham: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made.

The cash limit for class V, vote 2 will be increased by £9,552,000 from £289,010,000 to £298,562,000. This extra provision is required to meet the costs of decommissioning and radiocative waste management operations resulting from the recently announced closure of the steam-generating heavy water reactor at Winfrith.

The cash limit for class V, vote 3 will be increased by £800,00 from £39,317,000 to £40,117,000. This extra provision is sought to meet an increase of £550,000 in the cost of the Piper Alpha public inquiry and payments to the Scottish Office and others of £250,000 in connection with the Ocean Odyssey fatal accident inquiry.

These increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Waller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when the Pathfinder prospectus was issued; and whether it will be made available to Parliament.

Mr. Wakeham: The Pathfinder prospectus was issued on Friday 2 November and copies of the prospectus have been placed in the Libraries of each House.

ENVIRONMENT

Cash Limits

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if there are any proposals to change the 1990-91 cash limit or running costs limit for Ordnance Survey.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class VIII, vote 12 will be increased by £1,607,000 from £16,436,000 to £18,043,000. This reflects full take-up of the capital end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July. In addition, a presentational change is being made to the way that transactions relating to third party digitising arrangements are shown on the face of class VIII, vote 12. As a consequence the running costs limit for the Department will be increased by £247,000 from £56,946,000 to £57,193,000. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement.

Woodspring District Council

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action he proposes to take in regard to Woodspring district council under part I of the Local Government Act 1988.

Mr. Key: My right hon. Friend has today issued a direction under section 14 of the Local Government Act 1988 requiring Woodspring district council to expose certain ground maintenance work to competitive tendering again by 1 November 1991. He has taken this action because he was not satisfied with the response which Woodspring district council made to the notice served on 6 September 1990 under section 13 of the Act.

That notice set out the Secretary of State's view that Woodspring district council had acted contrary to the requirement of section 7(7) of the Act (which is that, in awarding a contract, an authority must not act in a manner having the effect or intended or likely to have the effect of restricting, distorting or preventing competition) in that it had failed to include in the draft specification and other draft documents for the ground maintenance contract to be let from 1 January 1990 the detailed information which was necessary for potential tenderers to prepare their tenders.

Hostel Deficit Grant

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the future of hostel deficit grant.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The resources available for deficit revenue funding of housing association special needs projects are to be more than doubled, from an expected expenditure of £36·5 million in 1990-91 to £60 million in 1991-92 and £95 million in 1992-93.

This will enable all existing projects already in receipt of deficit grant or with budget approval to continue to be funded and appropriate new projects, whose capital costs are met through the Housing Corporation, to be funded in the future. It will not, however, enable revenue funding to

be available for new projects whose capital costs are met by others or, normally, for existing projects for which deficit grant has not previously been paid.

The Housing Corporation will be consulting interested parties on a new determination which would bring this development in policy into effect from 1 April 1991. Meanwhile, it will not normally be approving any budgets for new schemes whose capital costs are not met by the corporation.

I am still considering whether HDG could be replaced, within available resources, by a flat-rate allowance. I hope to make an announcement shortly.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether he has any changes to announce to his Department's cash limits and running costs limits for 1990-91.

Mr. Chris Patten: Yes. Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates (i) the cash limit for class VIII, vote 2 (miscellaneous housing administration and grants) will be increased by £12,185,000 from £98,032,000 to £110,217,000, principally to cover additional payments to the Housing Corporation of £13,500,000 to provide accommodation for single homeless people, and increased funding of £1,500,000 for grants to voluntary organisations for the same purpose. The cash limit increase also includes £2,900,000 to cover additional costs arising on housing, building and construction research as the result of the Building Research Establishment charging its customers full economic costs. These increases are partially offset by savings, the most substantial of which is £4,800,000 for housing action trusts (HATs) following the decision by tenants at Southwark not to proceed with a HAT.

(ii) The cash limit for class VIII, vote 5 (central environmental services, etc.) will be increased by £8,504,000 from £357,896,000 to £366,400,000. This is mainly to cover additional grant in aid to the National Rivers Authority of £5,500,000 and an increase of £3,500,000 for grants towards the costs of water supply and sewerage in rural areas. There are a number of offsetting savings within the cash block. A further increase of £600,000 for environmental research is the result of the Building Research Establishment charging its customers full economic costs.

(iii) The cash limit for class VIII, vote 6 (royal palaces, Historic Royal Palaces Agency, etc.) will be increased by £95,000 from £149,847,000 to £149,942,000. My Department is taking up £145,000 of its capital end-year flexibility entitlement of £1,319,000 announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July. The £145,000 is for the new property services arrangements for occupied royal palaces. These increases will be partly offset by a saving of £50,000 in respect of grant to the Temple Bar Trust.

(iv) The cash limit for class VIII, vote 8 (Department of the Environment: administration) will be increased by £1,151,000 from £156,599,000 to £157,750,000 to enable various environmental initiatives to be taken forward and to cover the cost of administering the community charge system. Additional provision has been reduced by £795,000 in respect of the penalty imposed following a breach of this cash limit in 1989-90. The running costs limit for my Department will be increased by £4,128,000 from £153,458,000 to £157,586,000. Additional running cost provision has been reduced by £558,000 in respect of the penalty imposed following a breach in the Department's running costs limit in 1989-90.

(v) The cash limit for class VIII, vote 9 (revenue support grant, payments of national non-domestic rates, etc., England) will be increased by £34,832,000 from £20,009,457,000 to £20,044,289,000 to provide additional funds to cover the higher than anticipated proportion of community charge preparation costs grant which was not claimed by charging authorities in 1989-90. This increase is fully offset by savings on the non cash-limited class VIII, vote 14.

(vi) The non-voted cash limit for DOE/UA (urban aid and derelict land reclamation) will be increased by £7,000,000 from £897,666,000 to £904,666,000. The cash limit increase includes £7 million grant in aid to the Black Country development corporation for land acquired for the Black Country spine road. This has been offset by an equivalent reduction in the cash limit for class VII, vote 1. An additional £5,628,000 for local authority derelict land grant is being offset by equivalent savings in the cash block.

(vii) The non-voted cash limit for DOE/LACAP (local authority capital and credit approvals) will be reduced by £500,000 from £2,813,560,000 to £2,813,060,000 at the revised estimates scrutiny to reflect a £500,000 PES transfer to DSS from deliverable savings to cover additional rent allowances payable following some transfers of local authority tenanted housing to the private sector.

(ix) The net increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cash Limits

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he proposes to make any change in the British Council's cash limits for 1990-91.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class II, vote 4 (the British Council) will be increased by £1,800,000 from £74,433,000 to £76,233,000. This change is to take full account of the entitlement to end-year flexibility carry-forward announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990, of £1,500,000 and a PES transfer of £300,000 from the Department of Education and Science for payment of United Kingdom fees for TEMPUS students. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Cash Limits

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether there have been any changes in the cash limits or running costs limit of his Department for 1990-91.

Mr. Scott: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class

XIV, vote 6 (housing benefit administration and community charge benefit administration) will be increased by £5,500,000 from £114,464,000 to £119,964,000. The revision takes account of local authorities' additional administrative costs due to the raising of the capital limit for entitlement to housing benefit and community charge benefit from £8,000 to £16,000.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XIV, vote 7 (administration and miscellaneous services) will be increased by £116,000 from £1,706,259,000 to £1,706,375,000. The revision takes account of a transfer from the Department of Health (class XIII, vote 3) £224,000, a transfer to Scottish Office (class XV, vote 21) £63,000, and a transfer to Inland Revenue (class XVIII, vote 7) £45,000. In addition running cost changes result from a transfer to Department of Health and Social Services (Northern Ireland) for the running costs of the Belfast social security centre and the store for paid orders at Lisahally. There will be a corresponding increase on Department of Health and Social Services (Northern Ireland) vote 3, administration and miscellaneous services. There is also an increase of £1,813,000 to take account of certain variations from previously anticipated patterns of expenditure.

As a result of the changes the running costs limit of the Department of Social Security is increased by £850,000 from £1,930,326,000 to £1,931,176,000.

These increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

National Insurance

Mr. Andy Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has yet completed his review of national insurance contributions for 1991-92.

Mr. Newton: I have completed the annual review under section 120 of the Social Security Act 1975. My proposals will take effect from 6 April 1991.

Employees and Employers

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his statement earlier today, I do not propose to change the standard rate of contributions for employees, which will remain at 9 per cent. However, for employers I propose to reduce the standard rate contribution from 10·45 per cent. to 10·4 per cent., and to reduce the lower rate contributions of 5, 7 and 9 per cent. —which apply currently in respect of employees earning up to £175—to 4·6, 6·6 and 8·6 per cent. respectively. These changes go a considerable way towards offsetting the costs to employers of the proposed changes to statutory sick pay which I announced to the House on 24 October.

In line with the Social Security Pensions Act 1975, the lower earnings limit for class 1 contributions is to be raised to £52 a week. This is exactly equal to the basic retirement pension rate for a single person, which I announced to the House on 24 October. The upper earnings limit is to be raised to £390 a week, which is seven and a half times the new basic pension rate as provided by the Social Security Pensions Act. These new earnings limits will replace the current ones of £46 and £350 respectively.

Under the new structure for employees which came into force on 5 October 1989 people whose earnings reach the lower earnings limit will continue to pay an initial contribution of 2 per cent. of that limit and standard rate contributions of 9 per cent. on that portion of their earnings which exceeds the lower but not the upper earnings limit. The present banded system of contributions for employers will continue, although the percentage rates will be reduced as I have already mentioned and the ceilings for the lower rates will be extended further; they will now apply to weekly earnings which fall below the ceilings of £85, £130 and £185 (the previous ceilings were £80, £125 and £175 respectively).

Not contracted-out employees and employers

Neither the employee nor his employer will have to pay any contributions if earnings are less than £52 a week. Those whose earnings do not exceed £350 (the former upper earnings limit) will pay 42p a week less in contributions than at present. This is because a further £6 of their weekly earnings will be subject to a deduction of 2 per cent. rather than 9 per cent. For employees with earnings above £350 a week, the maximum possible increase will be £3·18 a week. Employers' contributions will generally be reduced and some employers will gain further where employees' earnings which were above the former ceilings fall below the new ceilings. Since there is no upper earnings limit for employers' contributions, and as the highest rate of contribution is being decreased, employers of the higher-paid will also pay slightly less than previously.

Contracted-out employees and their employers

Contracted-out employees will gain in the same way. The contributions due from employees earning less than £350 a week will drop by 30p a week. For employees earning over £350 the maximum possible increase will be £2·50 a week. The reduction in rates for employers will offset the usual increase which stems from the raising of the lower earnings limit and means they have to pay at the higher not contracted-out rate on a further £6 of earnings. So contracted-out employers will either pay slightly more or slightly less than at present depending on the level of the employee's earnings. Also there will be gains in respect of lower-paid employees whose earnings fall between the old and new ceilings for reduced rate contributions.

Self-employed people

The flat-rate class 2 contribution will be raised by 60p to £5·15 a week.

The rate of class 4 contributions, currently 6·3 per cent., will not be increased. The annual limits of profits between which class 4 contributions are paid will be raised to £5,900 and £20,280 from £5,450 and £18,200 respectively. Self-employed people who pay only class 2 contributions will pay an extra £31·20 a year in 1991-92.

For people with profits between £5,900 and £18,200 (the former upper profits limit) class 4 contributions will be reduced by £28·35 per year assuming an unaltered level of profits. For those self-employed people with profits at or above the new upper profits limit the annual charge for class 4 contributions will be £102·69 higher.

Class 3 (Voluntary Contributions)

The rate of class 3 contributions will be raised by 60p to £5·05 a week.

National Health Service Allocation

The allocation to the national health service, currently 1·05 per cent. from employees and 0·9 per cent. from employers, will not be changed.

The draft order, together with a report by the Government Actuary, will be laid before Parliament shortly.

HEALTH

Cash Limits

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes he has made to the cash limits and running cost limits of his Department in 1990-91.

Mr. Waldegrave: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimates, the following changes will be made.

The cash limit for class XIII, vote 1 (hospital and community health services, family health services (part) and other services, England) will be increased by £291,932,000 (from £13,902,857,000 to £14,194,789,000). This increase provides an additional £159,484,000 for VAT on construction and other minor capital expenditure; £110,000,000 for the cost of commitments for GPs' practice staff and premises improvements scheme; £23,284,000 for the full take-up of end-year flexibility entitlements arrangements as announced by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990; £1,704,000 for the pay award for senior nurses and midwives; £350,000 for a transfer from class VI, vote 1 for the North London School of Physiotherapy and £56,000 in respect of a transfer from class XIII, vote 3 for the artificial eye service. These increases are partly offset by a transfer of £2,746,000 to class XIII, vote 3 for management communication funding and £200,000 for work done by the Audit Commission.

The cash limits for class XIII, vote 3 (Department of Health administration, miscellaneous health services and personal social services, England) will be increased by £3,335,000 (from £687,918,000 to £691,253,000). This increase provides an additional £516,000 for expenditure on VAT on construction; £14,000 for the nurse regrading package and pay award for senior nurses and midwives; £2,746,000 transferred from class XIII, vote 1 in respect of management communication funding; £200,000 transferred from class XIII, vote 1 for work done by the Audit Commission; £100,000 from class II, vote 5, £100,000 from class XI, vote 1, £65,000 from class XVI, vote 1 and £35,000 from Department of Health and Social Services Northern Ireland, vote 3 for contributions to the international Peto institute; and £257,000 from class XII, vote 3 for the United Kingdom drug reduction task force. These increases are partly offset by £224,000 in respect of a net transfer to class XIV, vote 7 for reapportionment of staff resources following the splitting of DHSS; and £56,000 to class XIII, vote 1 in respect of the artificial eye service, and also a reduction of £418,000 for EC receipts for emergency payments for injuries resulting from the storms last winter. The provision for running costs on class XIII, vote 3 and the Department's running cost limit is reduced by £38,000 from £202,087,000 to £202,049,000. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

SCOTLAND

Cash Limits

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he proposes to make changes to the cash limits and running costs limit for 1990-91 within his responsibility.

Mr. Rifkind: Yes. I intend to make changes to 15 of the cash limits within my responsibility.

As a result of higher than expected receipts the cash limit on class XV, vote 3, regional and general industrial support, is being reduced by £1,500,000 from £142,216,000 to £140,716,000. This reduction will partially offset increases in other votes.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XV, vote 6, roads, transport and environmental services Scotland will be increased by £649,000 from £251,342,000 to £251,991,000. This increase includes full take-up of capital under the end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990 at columns *235-38*. Provision is also included for advisers' fees arising from the proposed privatisation of passenger transport companies and for a contribution towards the provision of weather radar stations by the Meteorological Office. Both increases are partly offset by corresponding reductions.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XV, vote 8, housing, Scotland will be increased by £9,381,000 from £306,983,000 to £316,364,000 to increase grant in aid provision to Scottish Homes to compensate for the withdrawal of section 20 status under the VAT Act 1983.

The cash limit for class XV, vote 10, privatisation of the electricity supply industry, Scotland will be reduced by £4,500,000 from £14,000,000 to £9,500,000. This reduction partially offsets increases in other votes.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the cash limit for class XV, vote 11, administration of justice, Scotland, will be increased by £125,000 from £42,665,000 to £42,790,000 for full take-up of entitlement of the end-year flexibility for running costs announced on 25 July. Accordingly the running cost cash limit is increased by £125,000 from £31,935,000 to £32,060,000.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XV, vote 14, law, order and miscellaneous health services, Scotland will be increased by £81,000 from £155,246,000 to £155,327,000 reflecting the take-up of part of the end-year flexibility entitlement for running costs of £580,000 announced on 25 July.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XV, vote 15, education, arts, libraries and social work, Scotland will be increased by £2,000,000 from £231,975,000 to £233,975,000 to reflect the full take-up of capital end-year flexibility entitlement announced on 25 July.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XV, vote 18, Scottish Record Office will be increased by £66,000 from £2,967,000 to £3,033,000 to reflect full take-up of capital end-year flexibility entitlement announced on 25 July.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XV, vote 19, General Register Office for Scotland, will be increased by £50,000 from £7,571,000 to £7,621,000 to reflect the full take-up of running costs end-year flexibility entitlement announced on 25 July. Accordingly the running costs limit will be increased by £50,000 from £8,341,000 to £8,391,000.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XV, vote 21, Scottish Office administration will be increased by £562,000 from £129,590,000 to £130,152,000. Increased provision reflects the take-up of the remainder of the running costs end-year flexibility entitlement of £580,000 announced on 25 July and will cover the costs of additional work undertaken by the Scottish Office Solicitors Office for the Department of Social Security. The expenditure on behalf of DSS will be offset by a corresponding reduction in the cash limit for class XIV, vote 7 and the Department's running costs limit.

As a result of these changes and the take-up of running costs end-year flexibility entitlement on class XV, vote 14 the running costs limit for the Scottish Office will be increased by £643,000 from £221,954,000 to £222,597,000.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XV, vote 22, revenue and rate support grants, Scotland will be increased by £16,540,000 from £2,479,300,000 to £2,495,840,000. This increase will be met from existing but unallocated public expenditure provision.

The cash limit for class XV, vote 26, privatisation of the Scottish Bus Group will be decreased by £40,000 from £348,000 to £308,000. This reduction will partially offset increases in other votes.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate the cash limit for class XV, vote 27, hospital and community health services, family practitioner services (part) and other health services, Scotland will be increased by £45,649,000 from £2,056,114,000 to £2,101,763,000 to cover the costs arising from the termination of VAT refunds on construction; to reinstate a reduction applied to health boards in the original estimate; to cover the costs of commitments for GPs' practice staff; for full take-up of capital end-year flexibility entitlement announced on 25 July; and to cover the additional costs of the senior nurses' and midwives' pay award.

The non-voted cash block SO/LA1, which covers non-housing capital expenditure by local authorities, is to be increased by £5,750,000 from £494,117,000 to £499,867,000 to reflect full take-up of £6,000,000 capital end-year flexibility entitlement announced on 25 July and a reduction of £250,000 to offset increases in other votes.

The non-voted cash limit SO/LA2, which covers housing capital expenditure by local authorities and capital expenditure by new towns, will be increased by £17,007,000 from £330,971,000 to £347,978,000. This increase reflects the full take-up of end-year flexibility entitlement announced on 25 July.

These increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether the Lord Advocate proposes any changes to the Crown Office's cash limit.

Mr. Rifkind: The cash limit for class X, vote 13 will be increased by £1,512,000 from £26,857,000 to £28,369,000. This is to enable the Crown Office to meet the cost of planned capital works originally provided for in 1989-90 on class XI, vote 14 but which have slipped into 1990-91. Of this increase £1,178,000 comes under end of year flexibility arrangements as announced to the House of Commons by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July 1990 at columns *235-38*. The increase is within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor's autumn statement today.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Cash Limits

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on his Department's expenditure plans for 1991-92 to 1993-94.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his statement today, the provision for the Department of Education and Science's own spending programme in 1991-92 will be £7,246 million, which is some £690 million (4 per cent. in real terms) higher than the corresponding plans for 1990-91. This figure includes central Government expenditure on higher education, science, and schools; it also includes specific grants to local education authorities and credit approvals for capital expenditure by LEAs.

In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment announced on 31 October proposals for the local authority settlement for 1991-92 which allow for a total of £17,485 million to be spent by LEAs on schools, colleges and other education services. That figure is over £2,400 million higher than the corresponding figure for 1990-91.

These two settlements, taken together, reflect the priority which the Government have given to education within their overall spending plans, and will provide an excellent basis for carrying forward our policies to raise standards and increase choice in the schools and to increase participation in higher education.

Local authority current expenditure

The Government's spending plans allow for local authorities in England to spend £17,485 million on schools, colleges and other education services. This is over £2,400 million or 16 per cent. higher than education's share of the 1990-91 grant settlement.

This increase recognises the role of schools and colleges in giving effect to our education reforms. Teachers and others are working hard to get the reforms into place, and good progress is being made. So long as LEAs, schools and colleges manage their resources effectively and efficiently, I am confident that the £17·5 billion total allocated to local authority education will be sufficient to achieve the further improvements we all wish to see.

Specific Grants

Within the £17·5 billion total, the Government will be supporting £36·4 million of spending through the grants for education support and training (GEST) programme. For 1991-92 the programme, which brings together the existing education support grants and LEA training grants, is focused on the education reforms, which account for over £270 million of the available expenditure

compared to £190 million in the current year. In addition to the £17·5 billion total, which includes £118 million for the careers service, LEAs will continue to receive grant from the Department of Employment for the technical and vocational education initiative.

Schools

Nearly £14 billion of the £17·5 billion will be spent on schools and school-related supported services. We are assuming a small increase in primary and secondary teacher numbers to just over 400,000. This will mean the continuation of the record low pupil:teacher ratio of one teacher to every 17 pupils. We are also assuming an increase in spending on school support staff to assist teachers in their work.

The pupil:teacher ratio in special schools is assumed to fall further to 4:8:1 to allow for staffing support for pupils with special educational needs.

For the great bulk of education funding, it is for LEAs and, under local management, their schools and colleges, to decide how best to deploy available resources. But the grant settlement allows for them to give particular priority to increased spending on school books and equipment and school repairs and maintenance.

Local Authority Further and Higher Education

The settlement reflects the buoyant trend of enrolments in LEA colleges, allowing for 677,000 full-time equivalent students on further education (FE) courses, and 43,000 on higher education courses. That includes a 7 per cent. increase in the participation rate in full-time FE courses by 16 and 17-year olds between 1989-90 and 1991-92. The FE staff:student ratio is assumed to rise from 10:7:1 in 1989-90 to 10:9:1 in 1991-92 as colleges continue to improve their efficiency. But the plans incorporate real increases in spending on college administrative and clerical staff, on books and equipment, and on repairs and maintenance.

Capital Expenditure in Schools and Colleges

In 1991-92 annual capital guidelines for local authority capital expenditure on schools in England will total £472 million. This compares with £410 million in 1990-91, an increase of 15 per cent. Building and repair grants to voluntary aided schools will be £130 million, which represents an increase of 21 per cent. over 1990-91 provision. An additional £2 million will be provided for grant-maintained schools.

These increases—providing for total expenditure of over £600 million on school buildings—demonstrate the Government's commitment, within overall constraints on public expenditure, to continued improvement in the school building stock. The plans allow for the growing demand for new school places in areas of population growth; the capital costs of removing surplus places elsewhere; building work needed for effective implementation of the national curriculum; and for equipping colleges to meet the skill requirements of the 1990s. Local education authorities can supplement annual capital guidelines from capital receipts and from revenue sources, and are free to decide themselves within their available resources what level of capital expenditure to devote to education.

Higher Education

Compared with the level in the present year, total available public funds for higher education are planned to increase by some 10 per cent. in 1991-92 and by over 18 per cent. by 1993-94. Spending on higher education will exceed £4 billion for the first time in 1991-92.

These plans will enable the universities, polytechnics and colleges to provide for the record numbers now wanting to enter higher education as the Government's education reforms take effect. More than one in five of all 18-year-olds are expected to enter higher education from next year, compared with only one in eight at the end of the 1970s. The table sets out the detailed projections of student numbers on which the new expenditure plans are based.

After adjustments to earlier plans to allow for higher tuition fees in October 1991, the additional funding in 1991-92 compared with earlier plans for that year comprises mainly:

(a) an extra £175 million for the two funding councils to distribute to universities, polytechnics and colleges—£42·5 million of it for building improvements and equipment; and (b) an extra £110 million for tutition fees, paid for those who qualify through mandatory student awards.

This may allow a small increase in academic staff complements as student numbers increase (by a projected 5 per cent. for full-time and sandwich course students in academic year 1991-92), but the scale of any such increase will depend on the extent to which cost increases, and particularly pay increases, can be contained. Universities, polytechnics and colleges will, in any case, need to make significant efficiency gains in particular by continuing to develop more effective provision for teaching.

These plans confirm that the Government are providing for the cost of the extra students enrolled beyond the earlier planned numbers as well as for an increase in resources for the funding councils. Universities, polytechnics and colleges remain free to take on, and finance through the tuition fee, as many qualified students as they are able to accommodate. The level of fees which will be reimbursed through public funds in 1991-92 will be up to these limits:

Classroom-based subjects £1,775
Laboratory/workshop-based subjects £2,650
Clinical medicine, dentistry, and veterinary science £4,770

Universities

The plans allow for an increase over earlier plans, excluding the fees for extra students, of £107 million in 1991-92 for recurrent and capital funding for the universities. They will also benefit from extra income from tuition fees expected to average some £2,280 for every additional student enrolled beyond the Government's earlier plans. Total planned available recurrent funding in 1991-92 is just over 9·5 per cent. higher than the expected level in 1990-91.

After taking account of the shift of resources from recurrent funding to higher differential tuition fees in respect of students allowed for in the Government's earlier plans, and of the transfer of the work of the Computer Board (apart from supercomputing which transfers to the Advisory Board for the Research Councils), the total available for recurrent funding in 1991-92 to the Universities Funding Council will be £1,599 million. As envisaged in earlier plans, this includes £20 million for the continuing cost of new academic appointments following the three-year restructuring programme. It will be for the vice-chancellors to determine what can be afforded for academic pay having regard to other cost increases, the

scope for efficiency improvements and the need for additional staff. The Government expect the 1991 pay settlement for academic staff to incorporate further flexibility and differentiation; and are considering further whether to hold back an element of grant for release only in the event of a satisfactory settlement.

The plans for 1992-93 and 1993-94 allow for the transfer of resources to the science budget, as explained in my separate statement today about a new boundary for dual support for science.

Capital funding for universities will be £10 million a year more than previously planned so as to provide for additional equipment for teaching and for necessary improvements in animal houses.

Polytechnics and colleges

The plans allow for an increase, excluding the fees for extra students, of some £68·5 million in 1991-92 for recurrent and capital funding for the polytechnics and colleges. They will also benefit from tuition fee income expected to average £2,174 per student for every additional student enrolled beyond the Government's earlier plans. Total planned available recurrent funding in 1991-92 is 10 per cent higher than the expected level in 1990-91.

After taking account of the shift of resources to higher differential tuition fees in respect of students allowed for in the Government's earlier plans, recurrent funding available to the PCFC in 1991-92 will be £870 million. As envisaged in last year's plans, this includes the final tranche of £5 million for the agreed restructuring programme and a final small tranche of £2 million for contingencies for transitional problems and liabilities. It will be for the polytechnics and college employers to determine what can be afforded for academic pay having regard to other cost increases, the scope for efficiency improvements and the need for additional staff. The Government expect the 1990 and 1991 pay settlements to achieve greater flexibility in the use of academic staff time and other improvements in conditions of employment within the resources available for 1990-91 and now announced for 1991-92; and are considering further whether to hold back an element of grant in 1991-92 for release only in the event of a satisfactory pay settlement in 1991.

Capital funding for polytechnics and colleges will be nearly £35 million a year more than previously planned so as to provide for priority building improvements and additional equipment for teaching.

For both sectors, the plans allow for funding council running costs including those associated with their move to Bristol in 1991-92.

Student Support

The plans allow for total provision of £1,015 million in 1991-92 to cover the costs of student support. This sum will meet the cost of grants at the 1990-91 academic year levels for the higher number of students now projected, and will allow for the uprating of student loans in line with the previously announced policy. Further details will be announced in due course.

Science

Provision for the DES science programme, including expenditure financed by EC receipts, will be £928 million in 1991-92, £1,030 million in 1992-93 and £1,113 million in 1993-94. The figure for 1991-92 takes account of the rescheduling of postgraduate tuition fees from annual to termly payments, which results in a reduced requirement of £8 million for that year only. In addition expenditure on the Antarctic research ship RRS James Clark Ross, which was provided as an earmarked addition to science funding, and on the relocation of the research councils' headquarters to Swindon will be substantially lower in 1991-92 than in 1990-91. The increased provision in 1991-92 will preserve the real value of the science budget once these factors have been taken into account.

The figures for 1992-93 and 1993-94 include additions of £50 million and £100 million in those two years to reflect the change in the balance of funding responsibilities between higher education institutions and the research councils from August 1992. From that date the grants made to higher education institutions by research councils will cover the full costs of research, except for academic salaries and premises costs. It is possible that further adjustments will be made next year.

I am inviting the Advisory Board for the Research Councils to advise me on the distribution of these resources that will best advance the Government's aims for civil science in the interests of the nation as a whole.

Higher education: projected student numbers

000s

	Academic years			
	1990-91	*1991-92*	*1992-93*	*1993-94*
Students in Great Britain higher education				
Full-time and Sandwich				
Home	642·0	674·0	686·0	685·0
Part-time (including OU)	401·0	406·0	408·0	409·0
Total FTE[1] (PT = 0·35)	849·0	885·0	898·0	899·0
Age Participation Index	18·6	20·3	21·0	21·6
Home students in the UFC and PCFC sectors				
UFC				
Home Full-time and Sandwich	298·0	312·0	320·0	322·0
Home part-time	49·0	50·0	50·0	51·0
Total FTE[1] (PT = 0·35)	315·0	330·0	338·0	340·0
PCFC				
Home Full-time and Sandwich	281·0	297·0	300·0	298·0
Home part-time	137·0	140·0	140·0	140·0
Total FTE[1] (PT = 0·35)	329·0	346·0	349·0	347·0

[1] FTE: Full Time Equivalent.

Mr. Hanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he has any changes to announce to cash limits on votes within his responsibility for 1990-91.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: Subject to parliamentary approval to the necessary supplementary estimates, the cash limit for class XI, vote 1, schools, research and miscellaneous services, and class XI, vote 5, science, will be amended as follows:

Class and vote	*Current cash limit*	*Change*	*Revised cash limit*
	£	£	£
XI.1	653,341,000	+4,309,000	657,650,000
XI.5	897,147,000	+5,184,000	902,331,000

The increase on class XI, vote 1 results from the full-take up of the capital end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 25 July, and a transfer from the Property Services Agency following the change of responsibility for maintenance of the European school at Culham. The increase is partly offset by an increase in appropriations in aid in respect of the British school in Armenia and a transfer to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to assist with the financing of the trans-European mobility scheme for university studies (TEMPUS).

The increase of £5,184,000 on class XI, vote 5 is to enable AFRC to meet existing commitments on restructuring work and for the strengthening of security measures at AFRC institutes (£2,500,000); for SERC to meet the costs of providing buildings to support SERC grants to research workers in higher education institutions (£2,134,000); and for ESRC to make payments in respect of the council's new computer system and the extension to Polaris house (£550,000). These increases are within the forecast outturn for the planning total included in the Chancellor of the Exchequer's autumn statement today.

Research Councils

Mr. Gill : To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of research councils for funding research in institutions of higher education.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: In January this year my Department issued a consultation paper proposing a change in the way in which research supported by the research councils in universities, polytechnics and other higher education institutions is funded. In the light of the responses to that paper and other consultation, I have decided that there should be a change in the respective responsibilities of the councils and the institutions for funding such research, with effect from 1 August 1992.

I have today written to the chairmen of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils, the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, the Committee of Directors of Polytechnics, the Standing Conference of Principals and the Universities and Polytechnics and Colleges Funding Councils telling them of my decision. The full text of my letter to the chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils is as follows:

Sir David Phillips FRS
Chairman
Advisory Board for the Research Councils
Elizabeth House
London SE1 7PH 8 November 1990

Dear Sir David

Changes in the Balance of the Dual Support System

The Department issued a consultation paper in January proposing an adjustment to the boundary of funding responsibilities between the Research Councils and Higher Education Institutions. It was proposed that, from the beginning of the 1991-92 academic year, the Research Councils should become responsible for meeting all the costs of the projects they fund, apart from academic salaries and premises costs. The purpose of the change was to clarify the respective responsibilities of the Councils and the institutions for supporting Council sponsored research.

The Board was consulted further in September on the detailed implications of the proposal, in the light of the responses to the January paper. I am most grateful for its advice. In the light of that, and of other responses to consultation, I have concluded that clarification of the funding boundary is necessary and that to achieve it there should be a transfer of funding responsibilites. I accept the Board's advice that more time is needed if we are to have a smooth and effective transfer, and I have therefore decided that the new arrangements should be introduced from the start of the 1992-93 academic year.

Under the new arrangements the Research Councils will meet the full costs of research they support, apart from the costs associated with the employment of permanent academic staff of the institution and general premises costs; these will continue to be the responsibility of the institution. Research Council grants will cover the full direct costs of projects (apart from the costs of academic staff), and will include a contribution to the indirect costs of the institution through a standard percentage addition to direct costs.

The arrangements will apply from 1 August 1992 to newly approved Research Council funded research in Higher Education Institutions, and (subject to transitional provisions) to projects in progress at that date.

I should like to take this opportunity, through the Board, to invite the Research Councils to work with the representatives of the higher education institutions and with the Department to draw up a detailed specification of the new boundary, to make their own assessments of the costs of the additional responsiblities it would entail, and to put in place new grant application arrangements in time for an orderly and effective transfer of responsibilities in 1992. I am also inviting the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals, in consultation with the Department and the Research Councils to undertake further work on research costs and in particular on the percentage addition to be used in dertermining the Councils' contribution to indirect costs.

I should be grateful for a report on the Councils' work by next April, when I will need to be satisfied that good progress has been made in drawing up the detailed specification of the boundary and in putting in place new grant application arrangements.

The Government's public expenditure plans for education and science which I am announcing separately today allow for our current best estimate that the cost of the additional responsibilities transferring to the Research Councils might amount to about £100 million in a full year. I will consider next year, in the light of the further work I am now requesting and of changes in the volume and cost of Research Council sponsored work in the interim, whether any further adjustment is necessary.

Yours sincerely,
K. Clarke
Kenneth Clarke

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 9 November 1990

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science whether he will set up an independent pay review body similar to that of the Houghton committee in 1974 to determine future teachers' salaries and conditions of service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: No.

Science Budget

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidance he has given the Advisory Board for the Research Councils in seeking its advice on the allocation of the science budget in 1991-92 to 1993-94; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have written to Sir David Phillips inviting the board's advice. The following is the text of my letter:

I was grateful for the Board's advice for this year's Public Expenditure Survey on the resource needs of the Research Councils, Royal Society and Fellowship of Engineering.

I am now able to tell you that this year's settlement maintains the value in real terms of the underlying Science Budget.

The Science Budget for 1991-92 will be £920·8 million, and the planning figures for 1992-93 and 1993-94 are £1,023·7 million and £1,106·9 million. Total provision for Science in 1991-92 includes receipts from the European Community and non-voted public expenditure by the IPSR from privatisation receipts, and will amount to £930·1 million.

Next year's Science Budget includes £1·8 million in respect of the transfer of responsibility for national supercomputing services from the Computer Board to the ABRC, and takes account of the rescheduling of postgraduate tuition fees, which results in a reduced requirement on the Research Councils of £8 million. The planning figures for 1992-93 and 1993-94 include:

(a) £1·9 million in 1992-93 and £2 million in 1993-94 for the supercomputing transfer; and

(b) £50 million in 1992-93 and £100 million in 1993-94 to reflect the proposed change in the balance of funding responsibilities between higher education institutions and the Research Councils from August 1992. It is possible that these figures will need to be further adjusted next year in the light of the further work I have commissioned from the Board and others.

In order to make a like-for-like comparison between the Science Budget for 1991-92 and that for 1990-91, it is necessary to make appropriate adjustments for the reduced capital requirement from 1991-92 arising, in particular, from the completion of:

(a) the RRS James Clark Ross, for which an earmarked allocation was made last year; and

(b) the new building work at Polaris House.

After making these adjustments, the Science Budget for 1991-92 is the same in real terms as in 1990-91. Set against the need to constrain public expenditure generally, this settlement provides the basis for the continuing development of the country's science base.

I am making no earmarked allocations this year and I should be grateful to receive the Board's allocation advice.

Since the Science Budget is a matter of considerable Parliamentary and public interest, I propose to follow precedent by publishing the text of this letter in the form of a Parliamentary answer.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions Ombudsman

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he proposes to appoint a pensions ombudsman.

Mr. Newton: I am pleased to announce that Mr. Michael Platt has today been appointed the first pensions ombudsman to deal with disputes between individuals and their occupational or personal pension scheme. The pensions ombudsman will be able to investigate and decide cases where maladministration is alleged, and also deal with disputes of fact or law, for example, over the interpretation of the rules of the scheme. Mr. Platt will take up his appointment on 1 January 1991, and he will be able to receive complaints for investigation as from 2 April 1991.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Consultancy Initiatives

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the consultancy initiatives.

Mr. Lilley: Since they were introduced in January 1988 the consultancy initiatives have made a major contribution towards overcoming the reluctance of small and medium-sized firms to use outside expertise to improve their competitiveness: over 63,000 firms have sought assistance under the scheme, the majority of which have never before used consultants. Two out of three firms which have completed consultancy projects achieve increased profitability within a year.

Nevertheless, many established smaller firms with a potential for growth remain to be convinced that using expert advice can bring them real benefits. Moreover, consultants can do much more to market their services to small firms. I am therefore extending the scheme for a final three years from 1 April 1991, by which time I expect the consultancy market among small and medium-sized firms to be self-sustaining.

A recent independent evaluation of the scheme, to be published in due course, confirms that a majority of consultancy initiative clients need only one assisted consultancy to be stimulated to further use of consultants at full market price. In order to increase value for money to the taxpayer, I have therefore decided to concentrate the support available: from 1 April 1991, only firms which have not previously used consultants under the scheme will be eligible.

Many small firms have already been helped towards improved competitiveness and growth by the consultancy initiatives. In extending the scheme I intend that many more should be able to plan, with the scheme's help, to meet the challenges facing management in the 1990s, including the single market, environmental issues and new technology.

SCOTLAND

Van Gogh Exhibition

Mr. Bill Walker: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what arrangements have been made to indemnify the forthcoming Van Gogh exhibition being held at the Burrell gallery.

Mr. Rifkind: The Scottish indemnity ceiling in respect of loans to non-national instititions has been increased from £30 million to £200 million for the duration of the exhibition.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 12 November 1990

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Fraud (Prosecution)

30. **Mr. Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the arrangements for prosecuting persons for fraud.

The Solicitor-General: The majority of fraud prosecutions in England and Wales are the responsibility of either the Serious Fraud Office or the Crown prosecution service. Both departments operate under my superintendence.

Judges

31. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Attorney-General if he will make a statement on the appointment of judges.

The Solicitor-General: The Lord Chancellor seeks, for each judicial post, the candidate who appears to him to be the best qualified to fill it and perform its duties, regardless of sex, ethnic origin, political affiliation, or religion. Copies of a speech made by the Lord Chancellor on this subject, and copies of a booklet entitled "Judicial Appointments: The Lord Chancellor's Policies and Procedures" will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Incitement to Violence

32. **Mr. Madden:** To ask the Attorney-General what representations he has received concerning laws against incitement to violence on personal, racial or religious grounds; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: Prosecutions for incitement to racial hatred require the consent of the Attorney-General and he frequently receives representations in relation to individual cases. Changes to the law are a matter for my right hon. and learned Friend the Home Secretary.

NHS Infected Blood

Ms. Harman: To ask the Attorney-General how many legal aid certificates have been issued to people who have lodged claims for damages for contracting HIV through national health service infected blood or blood products; and how much has already been paid out under those certificates.

The Solicitor-General: A total of 727 certificates have been issued, as at 8 November 1990. To date £708,088 has been paid under these certificates.

Serious Fraud Office

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General if the Serious Fraud Office gives advance notice to the press and media of a proposed search in premises of a company.

The Attorney-General: No.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General what information he has as to how many employees of the Serious Fraud Office are of Greek Cypriot origin.

The Attorney-General: One employee within the Serious Fraud Office has ethnic origins within the Greek Cypriot community. That employee is not involved in the investigation into the affairs of Polly Peck International plc.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General whether the Serious Fraud Office gave notice to the press and media of its search of the premises of Polly Peck International at Berkeley square, London on Tuesday 30 October.

The Attorney-General: No prior notice was given. Since the fact of the investigation was already in the public domain and the matter was one of substantial public interest, a short factual press notice was issued after the event.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General if the Serious Fraud Office normally requests the support of the police when it proposes to raid the offices of companies.

The Attorney-General: Section 2(5) of the Criminal Justice Act 1987 requires that a search warrant issued on the application of the Serious Fraud Office should be directed to the police who are then responsible for its execution. The police should be accompanied by a member of the Serious Fraud Office or other appropriate person in accordance with section 2(6) and (7) of the 1987 Act.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General whether the Serious Fraud Office had the full co-operation of the administrators of Polly Peck International on Tuesday 30 October; and why it requested the support of the Metropolitan police to carry out its raid of the company's office at Berkeley square on that date.

The Attorney-General: The Serious Fraud Office enjoys the co-operation of the administrators of Polly Peck International plc. The warrant in respect of the offices of Polly Peck International plc was directed to the Metropolitan police in accordance with the procedure set out in my earlier answer to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Attorney-General how many persons are employed by the Serious Fraud Office.

The Attorney-General: A total of 132 people are currently employed by the Serious Fraud Office including temporary staff.

Public Transport Disasters

Mr. Adley: To ask the Attorney-General what recent discussions he has had concerning the administration of the existing laws relating to corporate and individual liability following the public transport disasters; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: My right hon. and learned Friend the Attorney-General and I have discussed questions relating to criminal liability with the Director of Public Prosecutions and others, in connection with the sinking of the Herald of Free Enterprise.

NATIONAL FINANCE

MV Gur Mariner

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about his continuing inquiries into possible breaches of United Kingdom export licensing controls in relation to MV Gur Mariner and military-related exports to Iraq.

Mr. Ryder: An examination of cargo recently offloaded from the MV Gur Mariner at Vlissingen, Holland has been completed by the Dutch authorities. Nothing that would justify criminal proceedings in respect of export licensing restrictions in the United Kingdom has been established.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Sunday Trading

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what efforts have been made on the question of Sunday trading to reach possible grounds for compromise between the various factions involved; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Government continue to meet interested parties and encourage the development of common ground. There remain wide differences of view and no proposal for reform of the law has yet emerged with widespread support from the differing interests.

Police Cells

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women who were being held in police cells in England and Wales on 1 November.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 1 November there were 1,044 male and no female prisoners held in police cells in England and Wales.

Category A Prisoners

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown of the proportion of prisoners retained under high security category A, according to age, sex, all-crime, for each of the years since 1975.

Mrs. Rumbold: A full breakdown in the form requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The numbers of sentenced prisoners confirmed in category A at 30 September in each of the years requested are as follows:

Year	*Adult male*	*Female*	*Young offender*	*Total*
1975	235	3	4	242
1976	238	5	2	245
1977	252	5	—	257
1978	241	5	—	246
1979	249	6	—	255
1980	267	7	2	276
1981	257	6	2	265
1982	254	4	2	260
1983	269	3	4	276
1984	285	3	3	291
1985	309	1	4	314
1986	319	4	4	327
1987	356	3	11	370
1988	405	3	7	415
1989	413	4	4	421
1990	405	2	8	415

Prisoners (European Appeals)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will supply the number of appeals that have been received by the European Commission and Court of Human Rights from British prisoners for each year since 1979, the reason for them and the result of the appeal.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Of those cases which the Commission has decided to refer to the Government for observations, the following is the information available in respect of complaints about the prison system in England and Wales.

Year	*Cases of Complaints about Prison Conditions*	*Cases of Complaints about Prison Procedures*	*Findings of the Commission*	*Findings of the Committee of Ministers*	*Findings of the Court*
1979		1		1 Violation	
1980		3	1 Inadmissable 1 Struck off	1 Violation	
1981		6	1 Friendly settlement 5 Inadmissable or struck off		
1982		3	2 Inadmissable		1 Violation
1983		3	1 Friendly settlement 2 struck off		
1984		1	Inadmissable		
1985		4	2 Inadmissable	1 Violation	1 Violation
1986		5	1 Withdrawn 1 Friendly settlement	1 Violation	2 Violations
1987		—	—	—	—
1988		—	—	—	—

Year	Cases of Complaints about Prison Conditions	Cases of Complaints about Prison Procedures	Findings of the Commission	Findings of the Committee of Ministers	Findings of the Court
1989	1	7	5 Pending 1 Withdrawn 1 Struck off 1 Inadmissable		
1990	1		Pending		

Prisoners

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the current prison population as a proportion of adults imprisoned per 100,000 of the population in each European Community member state.

Mrs. Rumbold: The latest available information, for 1 September 1988, was published by the Council of Europe in table 1 of "Prison Information Bulletin No. 12", a copy of which is in the Library. The prison population per 100,000 inhabitants in England and Wales has subsequently fallen to 90 on 30 September 1990.

An article on "International comparisons of prison populations" by Collier and Tarling (Home Office Research Bulletin No. 23 pages 48 to 54) showed that the figures for different countries are unlikely to be strictly comparable, because the definitions of prisons and prisoners vary from one country to another, reflecting different legal and administrative systems. Examples of differences in the definitions are the inclusions or exclusions in a country's figures of juvenile offenders and mentally disordered offenders.

Postal and Proxy Voting

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the Government have spent in the last year promoting the use of postal and proxy voting among *(a)* the sick and disabled and *(b)* those whose occupation means they are unable to vote in person.

Mrs. Rumbold: Advertising on postal and proxy voting is undertaken only in the period leading up to a general election.

Asylum

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications he has received from Ghanaians in each year since 1981 for political asylum and in each year how many have been *(a)* granted asylum, *(b)* refused and *(c)* are still pending.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Information on applications and decisions is given in the following table. An estimated 1,290 asylum applications by Ghanaian citizens were recorded as awaiting a decision on 30 September 1990: however, this figure is a maximum which overstates the position because of under-recording of decisions made earlier.

Applications for asylum in the United Kingdom by Ghanaian citizens, and decisions

	Applications received	Decisions[1] Granted asylum	Granted exceptional leave	Refused asylum or exceptional leave
1981	13	5	—	3
1982	407	—	12	28
1983	689	199	126	199
1984	337	73	59	157
1985	175	89	48	252
1986	220	72	49	40
1987	153	47	115	107
1988	170	39	113	58
1989[2]	340	45	125	25
1990[2] (1 January to 30 September)	800	—[3]	—[3]	—[3]

[1] Decisions in a particular year do not necessarily relate to applications made in that year.
[2] Provisional figures.
[3] Reliable figures for 1990 are not yet available because of delays in recording.

Animal Procedures Committee

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many members of the Animal Procedures Committee *(a)* have in the past held and *(b)* currently hold licences to conduct animal experiments; and if he will list them.

Mrs. Rumbold: Under section 19(3) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, at least half the members of the Animal Procedures Committee are persons who neither hold, nor within the previous six years have held, any licence under the Act or under the Cruelty to Animals Act 1876 and the current membership of the committee conforms with this requirement. For some time, following attacks against researchers and their families, it has been our practice not to reveal the names of individual licence holders.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to achieve a reduction in the number of experiments under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: As figure 5 of the "Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals, Great Britain 1989" (Cm.

1152)—a copy of which is in the Library—shows, the number of experiments on living animals declined steadily for 10 years or more and has continued to do so since 1987, when the strict controls of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 came into force.

Ethiopian Children

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many minors from Ethiopia with no support accommodation in the United Kingdom have been refused entry at Heathrow and Gatwick airports, respectively, during the most recent 12-month period for which figures are available.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No Ethiopian children have been refused entry at either Heathrow or Gatwick airports during the year ending 30 September 1990.

Ticket Touts

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce legislation to make ticket touting a criminal offence.

Mr. John Patten: We expect to make relevant announcements in relation to football very shortly.

Electoral Registration

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those newspapers, magazines, and periodicals in which the Government have placed advertisements aimed at encouraging electoral registration among ethnic minorities in the last year.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Home Office electoral registration advertising campaign aimed at United Kingdom residents this year was a national poster site campaign; no advertisements were placed in newspapers or periodicals.

Maintenance Arrears

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has any plans to seek to increase the powers currently available to courts for the recovery of arrears of maintenance for wives and children.

Mr. John Patten: The Maintenance Enforcement Bill, which was published on 8 November, will improve the collection and enforcement of maintenance in the magistrates courts, the county courts and the High Court. The Bill gives the courts power to specify the method of payment when making, varying or enforcing a maintenance order. This should help to ensure that maintenance payments are paid regularly and reduce the number of enforcement actions.

Courts will have the power to order payment by standing order direct to the maintenance creditor or make an attachment of earnings order irrespective of whether the maintenace debtor has defaulted on his payments. In addition, the Bill allows a maintenance creditor to give a standing authority to the justices' clerk, when maintenance is paid to or through a magistrates court, authorising the clerk to take enforcement action.

ENVIRONMENT

Local Government Finance

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state the distribution of changes in the percentage of net income paid in *(a)* domestic rates in 1989-90 and *(b)* community charge in 1990-91.

Mr. Key: An analysis showing the distributional impact of the community charge was placed in the Library on 15 February. This showed that three out of five households would pay less with the community charge than they would have paid had rates continued.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to compensate local authorities which use their discretionary powers to waive the standard community charge for people whose repossessed former home remains unsold while they are liable to the community charge at their new address.

Mr. Key: The method of distributing grant to local authorities does not take account of the potential for raising income through standard community charges. There is, therefore, no case for compensating local authorities if this income is reduced as a result of the proposed changes in the maximum level of the standard charge which can be levied in certain cases, or if local authorities exercise their discretion to waive charges for certain categories.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to treat overnight visitors as the equivalent of ordinary residents when calculating the standard spending assessment.

Mr. Key: For 1991-92 standard spending assessments my right hon. Friend proposes to treat two overnight visitors as the equivalent of one ordinary resident, for the period of their stay.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if, following the reply to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), 24 October, column *234*, he will similarly list for each authority in the West Midlands county, and for Warwickshire, the numbers of people exempt from the poll tax.

Mr. Key: Available information returned by local authorities is as follows:

Number of persons exempt from community charges at 1 June 1990

West Midlands	*Coventry*	*Dudley*	*Solihull*	*Walsall*	*Wolverhampton*
Severely mentally impared	768	517	168	436	557
In hospital or home[1]	2,141	1,689	850	n/a	1,554
Aged 18 or 19[2]	1,880	1,190	1,200	771	760
Other[3]	29	61	19	44	121

Warwickshire	Nuneaton and Bedworth	Rugby	Stratford on Avon	Warwick
Severely mentally impared	247	131	245	186
In hospital or home[1]	488	632	246	991
Aged 18 or 19[2]	340	252	540	960
Other[3]	15	31	23	52

[1] Patients whose main residence is an NHS hospital or people whose sole or main residence is in a residential care home, a nursing home, a mental nursing home, a private hospital, or a hostel providing a substantial level of care, and who are also being treated or cared for in such an institution.
[2] Aged 18 who attach child benefit because they are still at school, or aged 18 or 19 and on a course of further, but not higher, education.
[3] People in detention, members of visiting forces, international headquarters and defense organisations and their dependents, including diplomats. Members of religious communities. Residential care workers employed at a very low salary, and full-time students whose term time address is in Scotland or Northern Ireland. These categories have been combined because of the small numbers involved.
a = Not available

Mr. Maxwell-Hyslop: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his proposal to increase *(a)* the proportion of community charge benefit paid by district councils by 60 per cent. and *(b)* the percentage paid by district councils in respect of rent relief for tenants with low incomes, is intended to increase the amount of community charge which district councils have to levy compared with what would be levied without those charges; and what he estimates the effect of these measures will be, per community charge payer, in the following district council areas: Mid Devon district council, East Devon district council and Teignbridge district council.

Mr. Key: The reduction in the rate of subsidy for community charge benefit and some housing benefit cases from 97 to 95 per cent. was taken into account in the Government's proposals for the local authority finance settlement. The standard spending assessment for Mid Devon, East Devon, and Teignbridge district councils are provisionally estimated to rise by 28, 29 and 31 per cent. respectively to reflect, inter alia, the reduction in subsidy. There should therefore be virtually no impact on community charges.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list those local authorities in England which have sought an attachment of earnings for the recovery of the community charge before employing bailiffs to carry out the task;

(2) if he will list those local authorities in England which have taken registered community charge payers to court for non-payment.

Mr. Key: The Department does not have this information.

Mr. Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will update the answer given to the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Mr. Thompson) on 15 February, *Official Report*, column *404*, using actual rather than projected figures for the community charge.

Mr. Key: The analyses already provided offer the most valid illustration of the distributional effects of the introduction of the community charge system. Use of actual community charges would not provide a proper comparison with 1989-90 rates, since increases in local authority spending mean that the community charge is raising 30 per cent. more revenue than was raised by domestic rates.

Local Authority Allowances

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, with regard to members' allowances under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, what plans he has to consult the local authority associations and other interested parties, on the practical implementation of the scheme after it has been in operation for six months.

Mr. Portillo: As I told the hon. Member on 26 July 1990, I intend to arrange for a review of the new system of councillors' allowances when that system has been in operation for about a year. Since the system has not yet been brought into operation, it is premature now to plan the review.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government propose to review councillors' travel and subsistence allowances under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. Portillo: Councillors' travelling and subsistence allowances are governed by the Local Government Act 1972. The amounts are in the discretion of the local authorities within maxima prescribed by the Government. These maxima were last increased with effect from 1 January 1990. I shall shortly be carrying out a further review.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the new system of members' allowances under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 will be introduced; and whether the quantum available to local authorities will be uplifted to take account of current levels of inflation.

Mr. Portillo: The new system of members' allowances will be introduced when we have resolved the technical problem that has been discovered. The regulations limiting the maximum amounts payable will take account of all the relevant factors up to the date at which they are made.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, with regard to members' allowances under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, when the new scheme will be implemented.

Mr. Portillo: When we make the regulations under section 18 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, we shall take into account the representations from local authority associations that the new system of allowances should come into effect no earlier than 1 April 1991.

Local Authorities (Complaints)

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list those allegations of anti-competitive behaviour against local authorities under the Local Government Act 1988 which his Department has received, detailing the initial date of complaint, the originator of the complaint, the subject of the complaint, that is, which local authority, and the nature of the complaints, on which the Secretary of State is currently considering futher action;

(2) if he will list the number, and nature, of complaints made by private contractors, or others, to his Department with regard to alleged anti-competitive behaviour on the part of local authorities in the awarding of contracts; and if he will list which authorities, and when, were the subjects of those complaints.

Mr. Portillo: These questions could be answered only at disproportionate expense.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the date, for each respective local authority, on which he received the initial complaint of alleged anti-competitive behaviour against the local authorities listed in his answer of 31 October, *Official Report*, columns *543-44*.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is as follows:
Bristol city: 8 May 1989
London borough of Hillingdon: 12 May 1989
Metropolitan borough of Knowsley: 19 May 1989
Borough of Charnwood: 20 June 1989
Metropolitan borough of Wolverhampton: 11 May 1989
Braintree district: 13 April 1989
Eden district: 4 August 1989
East Lindsey district: 13 November 1989
Birmingham city: March 1989
York city: 3 August 1989
Liverpool city: 31 May 1989
Metropolitan borough of Bury: 18 December 1989
*Humberside county: 15 September 1989
*London borough of Camden: 2 October 1989
Borough of Woodspring: 21 December 1989
Leicester city: 27 February 1990
Metropolitan borough of Doncaster: 19 February 1990
Borough of Thurrock: 16 March 1990
In each case the date given is the date of the earliest complaint related to the matter which was the subject of the section 13 notice. In the two asterisked cases the complaint was not of anti-competitive behaviour but rather of financial failure under section 10 Humberside and Camden and a failure to comply with the detailed specification of the work under Section 7(8)—Camden—of the Local Government Act 1988.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department, as a matter of procedure, notified those local authorities against which he has received complaints of anti-competitive behaviour under the Local Government Act 1988.

Mr. Portillo: The Department notifies the local authority concerned in all cases where my right hon. Friend investigates a complaint that a local authority has failed to comply with the requirements of part I of the Local Government Act 1988.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number and nature of complaints made by private contractors or others to his Department with regard to alleged anti-competitive behaviour on the basis of a direct services organisation or direct labour organisation not meeting the terms of the contract awarded to it by the local authority; and if he will list which authorities, and when, were the subject of those complaints.

Mr. Portillo: The information requested is as follows:
London borough of Camden: failure to comply with detailed specification under section 7(8) of the Local Government Act 1988: complaint made in October 1989.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the number of complaints of alleged anti-competitive behaviour received by his Department, initiated by the organisation Public and Local Service Efficiency Campaign; and which local authorities were the subject of complaints by PULSE.

Mr. Portillo: It is our policy not to reveal the identity of the originators of complaints about failures by local authorities to comply with the requirements of part I of the Local Government Act 1988.

District Councils

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his latest estimate for district councils achieving full local plans coverage by the end of 1992; and if he will make a statatement.

Mr. Atkins: The available information is not fully up to date. I hope shortly to have the results of a survey of local authorities' intentions which was recently carried out by the District Planning Officers Society.

Local Government Standing Orders

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will indicate how long after the proposed implementation date of 1 October 1990 the standing orders under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 are likely to come into force;

(2) if he will indicate the timetable for further consultation on the draft care standing orders under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

Mr. Portillo: We are still considering representations from the local authority associations.

Planning Gain

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he gives to those local authorities which wish to include planning gain policies in their local plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: My right hon. Friend has advised local planning authorities in planning policy guidance note 15 that, where appropriate, detailed development plans should specify the policies that the authority proposes to implement by means of planning agreements. Such policies should have regard to our general guidance on the proper scope of planning agreements.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement about the implications of the downturn of the property market on the resources of urban development corporations and on the financial difficulties faced by urban development corporations as a result of falling land prices and rising infrastructure costs.

Mr. Portillo: Urban development corporations are well placed to respond flexibly to changing economic conditions and are continuing to act positively to maximise development opportunities. The Government's firm commitment to their work is reflected in our spending programmes for the years ahead.

Local Plans

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received over the problems and constraints resulting from the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and the community charge on the completing of local plans by councils; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: I have received no representations on this matter.

Mr. O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what guidance he gives to local authorities that wish to obtain a district wide coverage of their local plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Robert Atkins: My right hon. Friend has urged district planning authorities in planning policy guidance note 12 to extend the coverage of local plans. Last year's White Paper—Cm. 569—indicated the Government's intention in the forthcoming planning Bill to impose a duty on authorities to secure districtwide coverage of plans. Transitional arrangements will ensure that work on revising and updating current plans will not be wasted.

Deemed Planning Permission

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what planning powers he holds in respect of county councils that award themselves deemed planning permission in contravention of their own structure plans; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Atkins: The Town and Country Planning (Development Plans) (England) Direction 1981 requires local planning authorities to report to my right hon. Friend any development proposal that would materially conflict with or prejudice the implementation of the development plan. My right hon. Friend may then require the proposal to be referred to him for decision.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning announced on 25 July the Government's intention to require local authorities to report to him or to the Secretary of State for Wales any development proposals by local authorities on their land that would conflict with the development plan, to enable them to consider calling in the proposal for their own decision.

Sheffield Development Corporation

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment to whom the Sheffield development corporation is accountable; who appoints the board members; who is responsible for monitoring their attendance and performance; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Urban development corporations are accountable to the Secretary of State and Parliament. The Secretary of State appoints board members. The arrangements for board meetings are for the corporations to determine.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Special Needs Education

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will make a statement on the provision of special needs education in west Cumbria.

Mr. Alan Howarth: Cumbria, including west Cumbria, is reviewing its provision for special educational needs, but no proposals are currently before the Secretary of State.

Teachers

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the number of teachers employed by local education authorities in 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990, or the latest date available in actual and full-time equivalent terms and the number of children being educated by the local education authorities for each of the above dates and the teacher/pupil ratio in each case.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested for local education authority maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools is given in the table.

	Teacher numbers		*Pupil numbers*	
January each year	*Actual (thousands)*	*Full-time equivalent (thousands)*	*Full-time equivalent (thousands)*	*Overall pupil/ teacher ratio*
1960[1]	—	—	—	—
1970	347·8	328·7	7,514·9	22·9
1980	455·7	438·1	8,183·2	18·7
1989	421·0	397·4	6,761·7	17·0
1990[2]	424·6	398·5	—	—

[1]Not readily available.
[2]Data on pupil numbers are not yet available.

Student Loans

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how much money was budgeted for student loans expenditure in the current financial year; and how much money which was budgeted for student loans has been reallocated to other expenditure.

Mr. Alan Howarth: There has been no change in the approved estimates provision for 1990-91 of a total of £147·6 million for student loans, shared between the Department of Education and Science, the Scottish Education Department and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland.

PRIME MINISTER

European Council Documents

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the titles and origins of the published documents submitted to the European Council in Rome which are now deposited, together with a note concerning their location.

The Prime Minister: A complete version of COM (90) 600, the Commission's opinion on political union, was deposited in the House on 6 November. In accordance with normal practice, copies were sent to the Vote Office, to the Library and to the clerk to the Select Committee on European Legislation.

Dog Registration (Vote)

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list the Ministers and civil servants who were recalled from overseas in order to be available for a vote on dog registration; and what was the cost to public funds.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. and hon. Friends were in this country to vote on the Environmental Protection Bill to ensure that an important part of the Government's legislative programme was completed. Questions relating to costs should be addressed to the appropriate Departments.

Dolphins

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister if she will make representations to the Japanese Government in respect of their practice of allowing the mass slaughter of dolphins on their beaches.

The Prime Minister: The British embassy in Tokyo has made clear to the Japanese authorities our strong concern over the death of nearly 600 dolphins on the beach at Miiraku on 4 November, and has asked to be informed of the result of any further inquiries into this incident.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Members' Pay

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will give the basic salary, and dates on which it applied, for hon. Members' pay and Ministers' pay, including the Prime Minister, for the period 1 January 1970 until the present.

Mr. MacGregor: The information requested is as follows:

Parliamentary salaries since 1970

	Full Parliamentary salary £	*Reduced Parliamentary salary* £
16 October 1964	3,250	1,250
1 January 1972	4,500	3,000
13 June 1975	5,750	[1]3,000-3,700
13 June 1976	6,062	3,000-4,012
13 June 1977	6,270	3,208-4,222
13 June 1978	6,897	3,529-4,642
13 June 1979	9,450	5,265-5,820
13 June 1980	10,725	6,130-6,410
13 June 1981	13,150	7,670
13 June 1982	14,510	8,460
13 June 1983	15,308	9,543
1 January 1984	16,106	10,626
1 January 1985	16,904	11,709
1 January 1986	17,702	12,792
1 January 1987	18,500	13,875
1 January 1988	22,548	16,911
1 January 1989	24,107	18,148
1 January 1990	26,701	20,101

[1] Between 1975 and 1980, Ministers received differing amounts of reduced Parliamentary salary according to their office.

Ministerial salaries since 1970

	Prime Minister	*Cabinet Minister*		*Minister of State*		*Parliamentary Under Secretary*	
		Commons	*Lords*	*Commons*	*Lords*	*Commons*	*Lords*
1 April 1965	14,000	8,500		5,625		3,750	
1 April 1972	20,000	13,000		7,500		5,500	
8 May 1975[1]	20,000	13,000		7,500		5,500	
30 June 1976	20,000	13,000		7,500		5,500	[2]5,812
30 June 1977	20,000	13,000		7,500		5,500	6,020
31 July 1978	22,000	14,300		8,250	[3]8,822	6,050	6,622
26 July 1979	[4]33,000	19,660		12,625	12,911	9,525	9,811
28 July 1980	34,650	23,500		16,250	16,400	12,350	12,500
13 June 1981	36,725	27,825		19,750	23,275	15,100	18,600
23 June 1982	38,200	28,950		20,575	24,200	15,700	19,350
27 July 1983	38,987	29,367	[5]30,110	20,867	25,350	15,917	20,390
1 January 1984	40,424	30,304	31,680	21,364	26,670	16,154	21,450
1 January 1985	41,891	31,271	32,260	21,881	28,000	16,411	22,520
1 January 1986	43,328	32,208	34,820	22,378	29,320	16,648	23,580
1 January 1987	44,775	33,145	36,390	22,875	30,640	16,885	24,640
1 January 1988	45,787	34,157	40,438	23,887	34,688	17,897	28,688
1 January 1989	46,109	34,479	41,997	24,209	37,047	18,219	30,647
1 January 1990	46,750	35,120	44,591	24,850	39,641	18,860	33,241

[1] In 1975 all Ministers chose to forgo any increase in their Ministerial salary.
[2] In 1976, only Parliamentary Under-Secretaries in the Lords received an increase in their Ministerial salary.
[3] In 1978 a similar differential to [2] was implemented for Ministers of State.
[4] In 1979 the Prime Minister chose to forgo any increase and from 1980 she has accepted the same salary as her Cabinet colleagues in the Commons.
[5] Since 1983 Cabinet Ministers in the Lords have received a higher salary than their Commons counterparts.

Late Sittings

Ms. Harman: To ask the Lord President of the Council how many times the House of Commons sat beyond midnight *(a)* in Session 1988-89 and *(b)* in Session 1989-90.

Mr. MacGregor: In Session 1988-89 the House sat beyond midnight 77 times; in Session 1989-90, it was 60 times.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Defence Exports

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of total visible exports was accounted for by defence exports in 1989.

Mr. Sainsbury: In 1989 approximately 2·6 per cent. of United Kingdom total visible exports were accounted for by items falling under those customs tariff headings which have been identified by the Ministry of Defence as covering purely military equipment.

WALES

Leybucht Bay

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library an English language translation of the European Court of Justice report on the preliminary hearing of the Leybucht bay case heard at Luxembourg on 16 October.

Mr. David Hunt: A copy will be placed in the Library as soon as it is available.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many staff are to be sent as observers to the hearing on 5 December at the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg in the case of European Commission *v.* Federal Republic of Germany regarding Leybucht bay.

Mr. David Hunt: None.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many of his *(a)* legal, *(b)* planning and *(c)* other staff went as observers to the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg on 16 October regarding the Leybucht bay case.

Mr. David Hunt: One member of my legal division.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the cost to public funds of sending legal representation from his Department to the European Court of Justice in Luxembourg on 16 October to observe the case of the European Commission *v.* the German Federal Republic re contravention of the EC wild birds conservation directive at Leybucht bay.

Mr. David Hunt: A total of £376.

Cardiff Bay Barage

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will publish or place in the Library a copy of the report to him by Mr. Roy Stoner of the university of Southampton institute of groundwater studies on the adequacy of the terms of reference of the hydrotechnical study of the groundwater effects of the proposed Cardiff bay barrage and his reply.

Mr. David Hunt: I have placed a copy in the Library of the House.

Marginal Land

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has made to the European Community Commission in Brussels concerning the designation of further areas of marginal land in Wales; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: The Government submitted an application to the European Commission in June 1989 to extend the less-favoured areas in the United Kingdom. We are still awaiting a formal decision by the Commission.

Chernobyl

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if any north Wales sheep farmers are still being compensated for the fall-out effect of the Chernobyl disaster; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. David Hunt: Those producers who farm in the restricted areas continue to benefit from compensation measures.

Toxic Waste, Pontlottyn

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will investigate the release of toxic waste to the environment at the Euromet Chemicals recycling plant at Pontlottyn, on 29 October; and what risks were posed to the local population and the work force by these toxic fumes.

Mr. Grist: The operation of the site is not subject to control by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution; it is the responsibility of the regulatory authorities—the Rhymney Valley district council, the Health and Safety Executive and the National Rivers Authority—to determine the existence and extent of any hazard posed by the operation of the Euromet site to water, public health and local amenity. HMIP's advice is available to these agencies on request.

I am advised, following investigations and remedial work undertaken to date by the district council and the Health and Safety Executive, that the site is in a stable condition with regard to risk of further incident similar to that of 28 October. If, during the further investigations and work on site, any immediate hazard is identified appropriate action will be taken.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

37. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made towards establishing the European bank for reconstruction and development following the recent London conference of prospective members.

Mrs. Chalker: Good progress was made at the October conference on draft operating regulations, rules of

procedure and the framework for a business plan. The next conference is in January, after the missions to eastern Europe by the president-designate and his team. The new bank has good temporary headquarters in London, and negotiations are in hand for a long-term headquarters building. I hope that the bank will start operations next spring.

UN Relief and Works Agency

38. **Mr. Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the Llewellyn Davis report on UNRWA commissioned by his Department.

Mrs. Chalker: I was pleased to fund a major feasibility study commissioned by the UNRWA and carried out by Llewellyn-Davies Planning Ltd. on improvements to shelter and services in refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza. The report was presented to the UNRWA in March 1990. We await its detailed response.

Timber Industries

39. **Dr. Kim Howells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what funds have been allocated by the Government to promote sustainable timber industries in tropical rain forest regions during 1990-91 and 1991-92.

Mrs. Chalker: The ODA currently expects to spend about £400,000 in 1990-91 and about £490,000 in 1991-92 on such projects in Honduras, Papua New Guinea, the Solomons and Vanuatu. The Commonwealth Development Corporation also has investment commitments to projects in seven countries.

The Gulf

40. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what resources have now been made available by the United Kingdom, as part of the international relief effort, to assist those refugees fleeing from Iraq and Kuwait.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government have provided almost £11 million to help developing country nationals fleeing from Iraq and Kuwait. Of this, £2 million was contributed to the international airlift and £750,000 to provide relief in the camps in Jordan. The balance is the United Kingdom share of European Community emergency programmes. British voluntary agencies and airlines also responded quickly and generously to the relief effort.

Cambodia

42. **Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has any plans to increase aid to Cambodia; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government are supporting the humanitarian activities of British non-governmental organisations and United Nations agencies, which are helping displaced persons within Cambodia. We are ready to consider with other donors how Cambodia's need for help with repatriation, reconstruction and development might best be met in the context of a comprehensive political settlement.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what circumstances Her Majesty's Government will fund development programmes in Cambodia.

Mrs. Chalker: The Government are ready to consider with other donors, initially in a reconvened Paris international conference on Cambodia, how refugee repatriation, development and reconstruction needs might best be met when a comprehensive political settlement is implemented.

Eastern Europe (Economic Growth)

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement detailing the extent of financial aid to be given to each country of eastern Europe to support their policy of economic growth through privatisation and the creation of enterprise economies.

Mrs. Chalker: Expenditure on the know-how funds for Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1990-91 will be £15 million. As announced on 8 November, provision for know-how fund activities overall in 1991-92 will be £30 million. For the specific purposes of privatisation and small business creation we have so far committed £2·1 million for Poland, £0·6 million for Hungary and £0·5 million for Czechoslovakia, but this is only part of the total assistance committed for the banking, finance, accountancy and management training sectors which all serve to underpin the policy of economic growth through privatisation and the creation of enterprise economies.

AIDS

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the 10 World Health Organisation co-ordinated national AIDS control programmes in Africa and the Caribbean to which the Overseas Development Administration has provided bilateral assistance.

Mrs. Chalker: The Overseas Development Administration has pledged support for 15 WHO co-ordinated AIDS control programmes in Africa and the Caribbean. The countries are *(a)* in Africa—Botswana, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe and *(b)* in the Caribbean—Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos islands. The ODA is also supporting the regional AIDS control programme of CAREC—the Caribbean Epidemiology Centre. Total ODA spending to date amounts to £7·18 million.

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money the Overseas Development Administration has contributed to *(a)* the World Health Organisation's global programme on AIDS and *(b)* the International Planned Parenthood Federation's AIDS work in each year since their inception.

Mrs. Chalker: The Overseas Development Administration has made the following contributions to the World Health Organisation's global programme on AIDS:

1986 £250,000; 1987 £3 million; 1988 £4·5 million; 1989 £4·53 million; 1990 £4·55 million—a total of £16·83 million.

Since its inception in 1987, grants of £1·985 million have been made to the AIDS unit of the International Planned Parenthood Federation as follows:

1987-88 £300,000; 1988-89 £685,000; 1989-90 £500,000 and 1990-91 £500,000.

South Africa

41. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many development projects are currently funded by the United Kingdom in the black townships and camps of South Africa; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: We have provided assistance so far this financial year to more than 260 community development projects in deprived urban and rural areas throughout South Africa. This is part of a substantial and growing programme of support for black South Africans. Total expenditure in 1990-91, including our share of the cost of European Community assistance, will come to about £12 million.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Callstream Gulf Advice Line

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the total revenue generated by the Callstream Gulf advice line; and how much of this has accrued *(a)* to his Department and *(b)* to British Telecom plc.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's share of the tariff for the 0898 service was £8,186. It is not the policy of British Telecom to divulge details of its share of revenue accruing from individual agreements.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the total number of calls made to the Callstream Gulf advice line to date.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: A total of 38,699 calls was received between 8 August when the 0898 number was introduced and 3 October when it was discontinued and replaced by a freefone facility.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to what purpose the proceeds of the Callstream Gulf advice line will be employed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The proceeds from the 0898 service will go to pay the accommodation costs of the Gulf Support Group. Any funds remaining will go towards a good cause connected with the Gulf crisis.

Cambodia

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what subject matter is to be included in the comprehensive political settlement to be agreed by the Supreme National Council under the United Nations framework plan for Cambodia.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: A reconvened Paris international conference on Cambodia, in which the Supreme National Council will participate, will agree a comprehensive political settlement on the basis of the New York framework drawn up by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. This comprises transitional arrangements for the administration of Cambodia during the pre-electoral period; military arrangements during the transitional period; elections under United Nations auspices; human rights protection; and international guarantees.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what conditions the Paris international conference on Cambodia will be reconvened; and what its agenda will be.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The Paris international conference on Cambodia will be reconvened at ministerial level once the conference's co-ordinating committee has finalised a draft agreement. Its purpose will be to adopt the final agreement of a comprehensive political settlement.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what efforts the Government are taking to prevent arms from being supplied to the warring factions in Cambodia, and in particular the Khmer Rouge.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The cessation of outside arms supplies to all the Cambodian parties is vital for peace. It forms an essential part of the framework for a comprehensive political settlement which all the Cambodian parties have accepted in its entirety and the United Nations General Assembly has unanimously endorsed. We are working continually, with other interested parties, for the implementation of the framework. There is no Government involvement of any kind in training, equipping or co-operating with the Khmer Rouge forces.

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information is available about the supply of Chinese weapons, particularly tanks, to the Khmer Rouge.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are aware that China provides a variety of military hardware to the Cambodian resistance. We understand that the Khmer Rouge has acquired a number of tanks.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* Hans Dietrich Genscher and *(b)* Gianni de Michelis about the visit to Iraq of Willy Brandt.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has explained to the German and Italian Foreign Ministers our view that the proposal for Mr. Brandt and other European politicians to visit Iraq under United Nations auspices would be contrary to the conclusions reached in Rome at the European Council.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has given to the Falkland islands request to declare a continental shelf around the islands to sell licences for the exploration of oil and other minerals.

Mr. Garel-Jones: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 31 October at column *567*.

HEALTH

Kidney Dialysis

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in the North Western health authority region are currently receiving kidney dialysis treatment *(a)* in national health service centres and *(b)* contracted out to private facilities; and at what cost in each category.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally. My hon. Friend may wish to write to Mr. R. B. Martin, the chairman of North Western regional health authority, for the information he requires.

NHS Infected Blood

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will estimate the costs of a full trial of people who are claiming damages for contracting HIV through national health service infected blood or blood products.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It is not possible to estimate the costs of such a trial at this stage.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department is negotiating with the solicitors of people who have taken court action claiming damages for contracting HIV through national health service infected blood or blood products.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have not been engaged in such negotiations.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the costs, including legal fees and departmental resources, to the Government so far in the legal case of people who are taking action claiming damages for contracting HIV through national health service infected blood or blood products.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. and learned Friend the then Secretary of State gave the right hon. Member for Manchester, Wythenshawe (Mr. Morris) on 15 October at column *664*.

Methylene Chloride

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been undertaken by his Department, consultants to his Department or in conjunction with other Departments to evaluate the carcinogenic properties of methylene chloride.

Mr. Dorrell: The Department's independent expert advisers have evaluated the available data and have concluded that methylene chloride should not be considered as a human carcinogen.

Pesticides

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to introduce a card system under which doctors would be required to report incidents of ill health in which pesticides may be implicated; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Clear-cut cases of poisoning by pesticides are reported to the agricultural inspectorate of the Health and Safety Executive. A card system could be useful and a pilot study is being undertaken on behalf of the HSE.

Medical Negligence

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the number of court cases in the last five years launched against the health authorities in respect of medical negligence; and of these *(a)* the number which were settled out of court, *(b)* the number which were resolved by a final court judgment and *(c)* the number still outstanding.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not held centrally.

Listeria Monocytogenes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on foodstuffs contaminated with listeria monocytogenes, in World Health Organisation categories 4.2.2.2 and 4.2.2.4, being sold within the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The public health laboratory service carries out regular surveys of a variety of foodstuffs including some from the two World Health Organisation categories identified in the question. The results demonstrate that listeria monocytogenes is widely distributed in the environment and that, as the WHO report concludes,

"the total elimination of listeria monocytogenes from all food is impractical and may be impossible."

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action he is taking to protect *(a)* AIDS/ARC patients, *(b)* pregnant women, *(c)* people with impaired immune systems, *(d)* elderly persons and *(e)* new-born babies from contamination by listeria monocytogenes; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what action he is taking to protect *(a)* AIDS/ARC patients, *(b)* pregnant women, *(c)* people with impaired immune systems, *(d)* elderly persons and *(e)* new-born babies from contamination by listeria monocytogenes within national health service hospitals; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: In February 1989 the chief medical officer issued advice to vulnerable groups that they should avoid eating certain types of cheese and to reheat cooked-chilled meals and ready-to-eat poultry until they are piping hot. He issued further advice to vulnerable groups in July and August 1989 about pâte. Copies are in the Library. If anyone is uncertain whether they should follow this advice, they should consult their medical practitioner. The Food Hygiene (Amendment) Regulations 1990, which become operative in April 1991, will require more stringent temperature controls of chilled foods in the distribution chain.

AIDS

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what are his Department's criteria for increasing awareness of the AIDS problem for people under 21 years of age;

(2) how much was spent increasing the awareness of the AIDS problem among people under 21 years of age, in the first six months of the current year;

(3) if he has any plans to initiate a campaign to counteract the idea of AIDS invulnerability among people under 21 years of age.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The AIDS public education campaign advocates prudence in personal behaviour, while providing young people with the information they need to protect themselves from infection. Government policy is that teaching about HIV and AIDS should be set in the wider context of health and sex education, and should encourage pupils to have due regard for moral considerations and the values of family life. The science order of the national curriculum requires that pupils should understand the need to have a responsible attitude to sexual behaviour.

The Government have promoted HIV/AIDS awareness in schools through a range of measures, including the designation of HIV and AIDS as a priority issue, the provision of guidance for teachers and a video package for use in schools. In addition, many colleges of further education include HIV/AIDS information in vocational and induction courses. A sum of £7 million has been provided this year to enable local education authorities to provide training for teachers and employ health education co-ordinators, for whom AIDS and HIV is a focal issue.

Young people aged 16 to 24 are a primary target audience for the Health Education Authority's HIV/AIDS public education programme, which aims to equip young people with the knowledge and understanding to avoid behaviour likely to place them at risk of infection, and to encourage them to act responsibly. The authority has also produced a pack for secondary school teachers, mass media advertising aimed at young people, a campaign aimed at young holiday travellers, and cinema advertising designed to reach young people with messages about personal responsibility. A further TV and cinema campaign is planned for later this year, which will address the issue of personal risk and behaviour. The HEA was allocated £10 million for AIDS work this year.

The Department of Health has asked health authorities to develop community-based HIV prevention initiatives, using earmarked AIDS allocations. It is expected that up to £20 million will be spent in the current year and this will include initiatives aimed at young people.

National drug prevention campaigns aimed at young people have emphasised the danger of spreading HIV through sharing injecting equipment. About £2 million a year has been spent on this work.

Eritrean Refugees

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what consultations he has had with the local authority associations about the costs faced by authorities in providing child care services for unaccompanied Eritrean refugee minors; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will call for a report from the London borough of Hillingdon on the cost of providing accommodation for children from Eritrea and adjacent territories; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Following a meeting with the local authority associations on 25 September, the Department wrote to the association on 22 October asking for information about the cost faced by authorities, including Hillingdon, in providing child care services for unaccompanied Eritrean children seeking asylum in the United Kingdom. We will consider what action, if any, should be taken when this information is received.

Listeria Ivanovi

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is currently being carried out by his Department into listeria ivanovi.

Mr. Dorrell: There have been no recorded cases in this country of human infection caused by listeria ivanovi, and only a handful of such cases recorded world wide. Listeria ivanovi is known to occur in the environment, although it has been only very rarely found in food. A small proportion of animal infections is caused by this organism. The division of microbiological reagents and quality control at the PHLS central public health laboratory is involved in general research in listeria and routinely tests for listeria ivanovi.

Listeriosis

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the trend in the incidence of listeriosis among pregnant women since September 1989; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table compiled by the division of microbiological disease surveillance centre at the PHLS central public health laboratory.

Confirmed cases of Listeriosis among pregnant women September 1989 to September 1990 (England and Wales: Reports to CDSC and DMRQC)

	Number of cases
1989	
September	4
October	1
November	3
December	4
1990	
January	4
February	0
March	1
April	1
May	1
June	2
July	3
August	1
September	4
Total	29

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide statistics showing the incidence of listeriosis by serotype for the last five years of available records.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is given in the table compiled by the division of microbiological reagents and quality control at the PHLS central public health laboratory.

Serotypes of Listeria monocytogenes from human cases of listeriosis in Britain and Ireland

Year	[1]1990		1989		1988		1987		1986	
Serotype	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.	Number	Per cent.
1/2	21	(37)	46	(17)	65	(21)	41	(17)	36	(33)
4b	36	(63)	170	(64)	216	(70)	181	(73)	66	(61)
4bx	0	—	49	(18)	27	(8)	23	(9)	0	—
Other	0	—	1	—	1	—	3	—	6	(6)
Total	57	—	266	—	309	—	248	—	108	—

[1]First six months.

Speech Therapy

Dr. Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of speech therapy for children in west Cumbria.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The provision of speech therapy for children in west Cumbria is a matter for the district health authority. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. E. Urquhart, the chairman of that authority, for the information he requires.

Non-urgent Operations

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the average waiting period within the South West regional health authority area for non-urgent operations relating to hip replacement, hernias, hysterectomy, prostate, cataracts and varicose veins.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information about waiting times is available only by specialty, not by specific condition.

Romanian Children (Adoption)

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for all local authority social services departments information available to him on the current status of applications by couples requiring home study assessments for the adoption of Romanian children.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Information is not available in the form requested. All cases associated with entry clearance applications are kept under review by the Department. We are satisfied that local authorities are seeking to respond to requests in accordance with the Department's recent guidance as set out in CI(90)17, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Disabled People (Care Arrangements)

Mr. Rowe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on Act Now's survey of local authorities with regard to the making of payments directly to disabled people for making their own care arrangements, a copy of which has been sent to his Department.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: It has been read with interest.

TRANSPORT

Rail Electrification

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much it would cost, at 1990 prices, to electrify the railway lines between *(a)* Edinburgh and Glasgow via Polmont, *(b)* Edinburgh and Glasgow via Shotts and *(c)* Edinburgh and Aberdeen; and what would be the difference in cost if all three lines were electrified together as one investment project.

Mr. Freeman: This is a matter for the British Railways Board.

Enforcement Agencies (Checks)

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will list all defects and contraventions discovered by checks carried out by his Department, the Health and Safety Executive and the police to assess on-the-road compliance with the regulations for the transport of dangerous goods by road during the past three years;

(2) if he will list the total numbers of roadside checks carried out by his Department, the Health and Safety Executive and the police on lorries during the past three years; and if he will estimate these checks as a percentage of all lorry journeys.

Mr. Chope: Details of all such checks carried out by these enforcement agencies are not available. The following information is available:

	HGVS examined at roadside		*Tachograph checks*	*Dangerous goods*		*(a) as percentage of total HGV fleet*
	(a)		*(b)*	*(c)*		
1987-88	228,370	[1](16,921)	984,015	n.a.	—	51
1988-89	322,645	[1](24,301)	1,375,481	9,537	[1](45)	70
1989-90	314,343	[1](25,980)	1,629,881	10,213	[1](84)	66

[1] Figures in brackets are prohibitions/prosecutions.
n.a. Not available.

The police carry out additional roadside checks. Goods vehicle journeys in the United Kingdom are estimated at 238 million in 1987-88.

The main thrust of Health and Safety Executive inspection and enforcement policy on dangerous goods is to assess compliance during visits to premises.

Dangerous Goods

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will consider introducing new regulations or amending existing regulations for the transport by road of ammunition, propylene and other potentially explosive substances;

(2) whether he intends to amend existing regulations or to introduce new regulations on the transport of dangerous substances by road;

(3) if he will consider amending the regulations that permit the transport of dangerous goods on flat-bed lorries.

Mr. Chope: The relevant existing regulations—the Road Traffic (Carriage of Explosives) Regulations 1989, the Dangerous Substances (Conveyance by Road in Road Tankers and Tank Containers) Regulations and the Road Traffic (Carriage of Dangerous Substances in Packages) Regulations—are regularly reviewed by the Health and Safety Commission. They will be updated as necessary.

New regulations to implement EC directive 89/684/EEC on driver training will be put out to consultation early next year.

The current regulations already require loads to be stowed safely in a suitable vehicle.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the number of *(a)* archaeological sites, *(b)* sites of special scientific interest and *(c)* areas of outstanding natural beauty which are likely to be (i) lost or (ii) damaged as a consequence of the proposals set out in "Trunk Roads, England into the 1990s"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: It is not possible to make such an estimate in respect of road schemes which are in the early stages of preparation. I assure the hon. Member that all road schemes are designed to avoid unnecessary adverse impact upon the environment and to maximise the environmental gains which result from new roads.

Minch (Tanker Traffic)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to dissuade tankers from using the Minch, and to prefer routes west of the Minch; and what advice is being provided by the marine pollution control unit.

Mr. McLoughlin: The deep water route (DWR) to the west of the Hebrides was established by the International Maritime Organisation, at the Government's request, in 1987. The route is clearly marked on charts with a note recommending that, weather permitting, laden tankers of over 10,000 gross registered tonnage should use this route instead of the Minch. It is important that tanker masters retain the freedom to use the more sheltered waters of the Minch in adverse weather conditions.

A survey last year showed that some laden tankers do not use the DWR even when the weather appears to be suitable. The Government are deeply concerned at this and have asked other Governments, through the International Maritime Organisation, to ensure that mariners are aware of the DWR and to encourage them to use it. My Department has written to the owners of tankers seen using the Minch in good weather to ask for their reasons and to urge them to use the DWR. My Department is preparing a notice to mariners to be issued to the masters of all tankers calling at Sullum Voe, urging them to use the DWR.

The marine pollution control unit is not responsible for issuing this advice, but, of course, it takes every opportunity to remind oil companies of the sensitivity of the Minch.

Rail Bridges

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what is the number of bridges owned by British Rail that presently require structural repairs or underpinning; and if he will estimate the cost;

(2) what are his Department's criteria for funding structural repairs to bridges, which carry roads over rail, owned by local authorities;

(3) what are his Department's criteria for funding structural repairs to bridges which carry rail over road, owned by British Rail.

Mr. Freeman: Most road bridges over railways in England belong to British Rail. Responsibility for them is shared by British Rail and the relevant highway authority. Their respective responsibilities are governed by sections 117 and 118 of the Transport Act 1968 and the Railway Bridges (Load-Bearing Standards) England and Wales Order 1972.

British Rail bridges over roads are solely the responsibility of the board itself.

It is for British Rail and for highway authorities respectively to determine their own spending priorities for structural maintenance and other work. From 1991-92, local authority expenditure on the structural maintenance of all the bridges which carry their roads will be eligible for transport supplementary grant.

The Department does not hold details of all the bridges owned by British Rail or of the work that needs to be done to them.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the number of traffic accidents causing structural damage to British Rail bridges in July, August and September of the current year; and what was the cost.

Mr. Chope: The number of reported traffic accidents causing structural damage to British Rail bridges in the current year was as follows:

	Number
July	8
August	5
September	8

Information on the cost of these incidents is not available.

Lavatories (Trains)

Mr. Bowis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what reports he has received on the danger to public health of British Rail trains having lavatories which flush directly on to the track; when British Rail first revealed to his Department the 1957 report on this practice; how many trains have since been provided with containers that can be emptied at depots; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The railway inspectorate has received a report from a senior employment medical adviser of the Health and Safety Executive that the risk of contracting disease from deposits on the track is slight. This matter is kept under regular review by the railway industry advisory committee of the Health and Safety Commission.

Retention tanks are, or will be, fitted to new InterCity stock: mark III sleeper stock, mark IV and mark V stock, which are designed to run at high speeds; to certain Network SouthEast trains, for example, the class 319 which operate through the Thameslink tunnels; and the channel tunnel stock, which will operate both at speed and through tunnel. It is not practicable retrospectively to fit retention tanks to existing stock.

Prestwick Airport

Mr. Foulkes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has about the loss of power and subsequent loss of air traffic control service at Atlantic house, Prestwick on Friday 2 November; if he will set up an inquiry into the incident; what action he is taking to ensure there is no recurrence, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: The power failure at the Scottish and oceanic air traffic control centre, which occurred at 2.37 pm on 2 November, lasted for eight minutes and resulted in radar data on the height and position of aircraft being unavailable to air traffic controllers at the centre for a period of 13 minutes. Ground-to-air VHF communications links were maintained throughout this period and standard procedures for reverting to a manual mode of operation were immediately activated. The transition to the manual mode of operation was achieved by the controllers professionally and without incident. Safety standards were unimpaired, although some flights were delayed.

The Civil Aviation Authority has already set up a full inquiry into the incident, whose purpose is to establish beyond doubt the causes of the failure and to take the necessary remedial action to prevent a recurrence.

Dock Workers

Mr. Andrew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if, in relation to the dock labour scheme, he will list *(a)* the estimated number of registered dockers who were expected to leave the industry by individual port, given as a percentage of the total of registered dockers as well as the actual figure, *(b)* the estimated contribution from the Government to the redundancy compensation scheme also by individual scheme port, *(c)* the actual number of registered dockers who have left the industry to date, by individual port, given as a percentage of the total of registered dockers as well as the actual figure and *(d)* the actual contribution from the Government to the redundancy compensation scheme also by individual scheme port.

Mr. McLoughlin: The Government made no estimate before the compensation scheme was introduced either of the likely number of registered dock workers—RDWs—who would be made redundant or of the Government's contribution to their compensation on a port-by-port basis. The number of former registered dock workers at each scheme port who had been made redundant or had been given notice of redundancy by 9 November 1990, and the Government's contribution towards their compensation, are as follows:

Ports	*Number of RDWs made redundant*	*Percentage of RDWs in port*	*Government contribution £*
Aberdeen	149	100	4,921,500
Ardrossan	15	100	250,500
Ayr	14	100	215,250
Barrow	1	12	12,500
Barry	65	100	1,131,500
Bristol	419	87	4,019,000
Blyth	35	67	498,000
Boston	59	68	1,015,000
Cardiff	157	96	2,784,000
Charleston	1	100	12,500
Clyde	110	87	1,894,000
Dundee	95	100	3,063,500
Falmouth	7	100	114,500
Fleetwood	44	100	741,000
Forth	151	65	2,500,750
Fowey	44	100	770,000
Garston	108	100	2,170,500
Goole	135	82	1,396,500
Grimsby and Immingham	532	74	14,283,750
Great Yarmouth	101	100	2,937,000
Hull	572	85	9,762,000
Ipswich	64	53	989,500
Kings Lynn	41	77	717,500
Liverpool	610	52	13,124,500
London	948	54	16,657,800
Lowestoft	40	100	340,000
Manchester	162	100	3,435,000
Medway	110	20	1,905,500
Newport	91	45	1,439,500
Par	28	100	484,000
Penzance	8	100	129,000
Plymouth	17	74	297,500
Port Talbot	6	14	105,000
Seaham	10	63	130,750
Sharpness	9	23	157,500
Silloth	1	33	5,500
Southampton	458	67	7,839,500
Swansea	81	83	1,335,000
Sunderland	31	100	524,500
Tees and Hartlepool	454	93	4,336,125
Tyne	63	54	1,019,000
Weymouth	11	100	168,500
Wisbech	11	92	332,500
Workington	10	63	143,000

SOCIAL SECURITY

Care Homes

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what was the full cost of the recent Price Waterhouse survey of care home costs.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The costs of individual studies are not made public as that could breach commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is his policy with regard to the payment of housing benefits to care home residents.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Sir Geoffrey Finsberg) on 29 October at columns *368-70*.

Child Benefit

Mrs. Ann Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if, under the new rules, *(a)* the first child of any woman, *(b)* the first child of any man and *(c)* the first child of a couple who may separately have other children, will be eligible for child benefit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is proposed that the additional payment of £1 announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his statement on 24 October should go to all families receiving child benefit. It will be paid in respect of a child who, at any given time, is the only, elder or eldest child for whom the family is being paid child benefit. The question whether a child is the first child of a woman, man or couple is not of itself a determining factor. If a couple are getting child benefit for other children in their family, for example, from a previous marriage or marriages it will be the elder or eldest child overall who will qualify for the additional payment.

Family Credit

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing how many people were provided for by family income supplement/family credit in London, identifying children separately, in 1970, 1980, 1987, 1988, 1989, and 1990.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Information on a local basis has been available only since 1989, and only then in regard to the number of families rather than the number of people provided for. The information is as follows:

Number of families receiving family credit who, at the time the award was made, were living in the area covered by the London postal districts.

	Number
April 1989[1]	11,189
October 1990[2]	13,753

[1] Earliest date for which local information is available.
[2] Latest date for which local information is available.

Sick Pay

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish his latest estimates of the number of employees who will cease to qualify for the higher rate of statutory sick pay as a result of the recently announced changes to the scheme; and if he will show a breakdown of the figures for male and female employees.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: About 3 million employees with earnings between £125 and £185 will no longer be eligible for the higher rate of statutory sick pay—SSP—if they fall sick on or after 6 April 1991. But the number of spells of sickness where the amount of SSP entitlement will be reduced will, of course, be much smaller; it is estimated to be about 600,000 out of an annual total of some 6 million.

It is estimated that about 60 per cent. of those affected will be women. For the majority of employees, occupational sick pay schemes will make up any difference in SSP entitlement. All employees already receiving the higher rate of SSP at 6 April 1991 will continue to receive that rate until their current period of entitlement ends, regardless of their earnings.

Those employees currently eligible for the lower rate of SSP, who are mainly in low-paid or part-time employment, are generally less likely to be in occupational sick pay schemes. Such employees will have their SSP fully uprated by £4·25 to £43·50 per week.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State explained in his uprating statement, the flat rate element of statutory maternity pay—SMP—will no longer move in step with SSP. Instead, at this uprating, SMP will be increased by £5·25 to £44·50 per week, which is £1 above the RPI increase. This will benefit some 260,000 women. Similarly, a further 55,000 mothers to be will benefit from the addition of an extra £1 to the national insurance maternity allowance, taking it from £35·70 to £40·60 per week.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish the latest estimates of *(a)* the number of employees covered by occupational sick pay schemes, expressed also as a percentage of the total work force and to show a breakdown of the figures for male and female employees and *(b)* the percentage of workers covered by such schemes but who are not eligible for sick pay due to exclusion clauses in operation with a breakdown of the figures for male and female employees.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Out of a total work force of some 22 million it is estimated that 20 million—91 per cent.—work for employers providing occupational sick pay cover. These comprise about 11 million men—90 per cent. of the male work force—and 9 million women—92 per cent. of the female work force. Detailed information about the number of employees who may be excluded from their employers' sick pay scheme is not available, but research shows that half the private sector schemes have no exclusion clauses whatsoever.

Income Support

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will publish a table showing how many people were provided for by supplementary benefit/income support in London, identifying children separately, in 1970, 1980, 1987, 1988, 1989 and 1990.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pensioners (Transitional Protection)

Mr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners received transitional protection in *(a)* 1988, *(b)* 1989 and *(c)* at the latest available date.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The number of income support claimants who were receiving one of the pensioner premiums and statutory transitional protection shortly after each annual benefit uprating was *(a)* 710,000 in May 1988, *(b)* 241,000 in May 1989 and *(c)* 43,000 in May 1990.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

European Agricultural Fund

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much has been spent by each EC country on the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund in *(a)* ecus and *(b)* pounds sterling since 1985.

Mr. Gummer: Contributions by member states to the EC budget are towards the cost of total EC expenditure and not towards any particular element such as the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund.

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the amounts spent by the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund in *(a)* the EC and *(b)* the United Kingdom since 1985 in (i) ecus and (ii) pounds sterling.

Mr. Gummer: Expenditure since 1985 by the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF) in total and in the United Kingdom is set in the table.

	Total EAGGF		*Of which United Kingdom*	
	mecu	*£ million*	*mecu*	*£ million*
1985	20,465	12,034	2,018	1,187
1986	22,911	14,843	2,074	1,344
1987	23,876	17,174	1,836	1,321
1988	28,830	19,557	2,077	1,409
1989	27,225	17,825	1,989	1,302

Source: EAGGF Guidance and Guarantee Fund Annual Reports.

Animal Slaughter

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy for animals intended for human consumption to be slaughtered as near to the point of production as possible; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: In its proposals for a Community regulation on the protection of animals in transit the Commission has proposed a limitation of journeys for animals going for slaughter, linked to the maximum intervals between feeding and watering which would be established for each species. I support this general approach, but we will wish to ensure that the arrangements are practicable and enforceable.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has in repect of the numbers of animals intended for human consumption which are *(a)* slaughtered at point of production, *(b)* slaughtered within a 50-mile radius of production, *(c)* slaughtered within the United Kingdom other than those listed in *(a)* and *(b)* above and *(d)* exported live, giving separate information for (i) cattle, (ii) sheep and (iii) pigs if possible.

Mr. Maclean: Information on the slaughtering of animals in relation to their point of production is not available. Statistics on the number of animals slaughtered in this country or exported live for meat purposes are as follows.

	Cattle	*Sheep*	*Pigs*
[1]*Great Britain slaughterings:*			
1989	2,967,000	18,852,000	13,414,000
January to September 1990	2,151,000	13,643,000	9,616,000
[2]*Great Britain exports for slaughter or further fattening:*			
1989	304,279	491,892	24
January to September 1990	224,230	335,647	Nil

Note: Great Britain figures are given as it is assumed that in question *(d)* the hon. Member is interested in exports to continental Europe rather than trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.
Source: MAFF statistics.
[1] Monthly estimates of Great Britain slaughterings.
[2] Returns from Portal offices in Great Britain.

North Sea (Dumping)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the implications for the marine environment of the North sea of the dumping by oil companies of radioactive waste from oil rigs; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Authorisation for the disposal of radioactive materials from oil rigs in the North sea arising from drilling operations are issued by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution on behalf of the Secretary of State for the Environment and by the Scottish Office on behalf of the Secretary of State for Scotland.

The Ministry has undertaken some assessments for Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution relating to disposals. The concentrations of activity involved were not of radiological significance for the marine environment.

Sewage Sludge

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his Department will amend the terms of the licences to dump sewage sludge granted to Welsh Water plc and Wessex Water plc when they are next reviewed to provide that the dumping must take place to the north-west of Lundy Island; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: We have no plans to do so. Disposal sites are very carefully selected and monitored and the site used by Wessex Water and Welsh Water is considered to be the most suitable. The site is swept by strong currents which carry the material away from the north Devon coastline. It is also subject to less commercial offshore fishing than sites to the north-west of Lundy island. There is no evidence of adverse effect on the marine environment or to the coastline from use of this site.

Regional Food

Mr. Speller: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what is his policy on supporting speciality regional food production for the national export market.

Mr. Curry: The services of Food From Britain are available to speciality food producers to help them to exploit the growing demand for British regional products. In particular, FFB is able to help producers to contact potential trade buyers of their products. FFB also operates on behalf of this Department the speciality food group grant scheme under which assistance is available over three years for groups employing marketing development staff.

Soft Drinks (Labelling)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has any plans to increase labelling requirements in respect of soft drinks which claim to provide strength, energy and sporting prowess to the consumer.

Mr. Maclean: The Food Advisory Committee is currently considering the question of claims as part of the review of food labelling which I announced on 15 November 1989. I expect to receive its report at the end of the year. Any proposals for further legislative controls will be the subject of wide consultation with interested parties before any new draft regulations are introduced.

Pesticides

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has made an assessment of the environmental implications resulting from the increase in crop acreage and total pesticide treated area between 1970 and 1989; if he will make it his policy to institute a programme to decrease the acreage subject to pesticide spraying; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Advisory Committee on Pesticides, through its environmental panel, monitors continuously the impact of pesticides, particularly on wildlife. The results are published annually and show that the procedures involved in registration of crop protection chemicals have largely eliminated adverse effects from approved uses.

The Government have set out their policy on pesticides in the environment White Paper. The first of its governing principles is that the amounts of pesticide used should be limited to the minimum necessary for the effective control of pests compatible with the protection of human health and the environment. This Department is spending over £20 million per year on research into pests and pesticides, particularly aimed at reducing their usage. The tonnage of pesticidal active ingredients has actually dropped by 17 per cent. over the last 10 years.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will now require foodstuffs which may contain pesticide residues to be labelled as such.

Mr. Maclean: The labelling of foodstuffs treated with pesticides is being considered by the Food Advisory Committee as part of a review of food labelling which is expected to be concluded by the end of the year. EC Agriculture Ministers will discuss on 27 November a proposal for compulsory labelling of fruit and vegetables treated post-harvest, but are likely to recommend further preparatory work by the Commission.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has made a recent estimate of the quantities of pesticide residues present within the flesh of fruit; what steps he has taken to measure these quantities; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: The Department's central science laboratories are currently studying the distribution of residues between flesh and peel of apples treated with common pesticides. The results of this work will be published.

EMPLOYMENT

Premises Inspection

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what provisions he has made to provide local authorities with adequate funding to ensure they are financially able to carry out the inspection of those premises the responsibility for which was recently transferred from the Health and Safety Executive to local authorities; whether the budget of the Health and Safety Executive has been reassessed in the light of the transfer of this responsibility; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will list by region, county, district or other convenient division the number of premises, the responsibility for inspection of which has now been transferred from the Health and Safety Executive to local authorities; and what steps he is taking to ensure local authorities are fully aware of their new responsibilities and are carrying them out.

Mr. Forth: The Health and Safety (Enforcing Authority) Regulations 1989 resulted in net transfer of enforcement responsibility for an estimated 120,000 premises to the 461 local authorities enforcing health and safety legislation in Great Britain. Information on the regional distribution of those premises is not available.

The regulations were the subject of extensive consultations and local authority associations gave assurances that the new responsibilities could be accommodated through greater use of priority planning systems which determine frequency of inspections. The HSE's resources are reviewed annually as part of the public expenditure survey and full account is taken of changing responsibilities.

Local authorities throughout the country have been made fully aware of their new responsibilities through local briefings and enforcement guidance to inspectors.

EC Asbestos Directive

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what response has been made by Her Majesty's Government to the European Commission proposal for a Council directive amending directive 83/477/EEC on the protection of workers from risks related to exposure to asbestos at work (COM(90)184 final); and when he expects the new directive to be implemented.

Mr. Forth: The Government fully welcome the Commission's proposals to strengthen the provisions of the 1983 directive on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to asbestos at work, and have actively supported the proposals during examination in the Council's social questions working group. It is expected that the draft directive will be considered at the Social Affairs Council on 26 November. It is likely that member states will need to implement the amending directive by 31 December 1992.

Industrial Tribunals

Mr. Archer: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many sittings of part-time chairmen of industrial tribunals took place in the last quarter for which figures are available.

Mr. Forth: In the quarter ended 30 September, part-time chairmen of industrial tribunals undertook 493 session days in England and Wales and 89 in Scotland.

Pig Farms

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what estimate he has of number of the workers in the intensive pig farming business who suffer from chest complaints; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: Studies by the Health and Safety Executive and others suggest that workers in intensive pig rearing houses have a higher prevalence of a range of respiratory symptoms than the general population. The Health and Safety Executive is currently analysing the available data and I will write to the hon. Member once I can give a more definitive reply.

SCOTLAND

Speedlink

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will estimate how much additional freight would have to be transported by road each year in Scotland if British Rail closes its Speedlink operation; and how many more lorry movements would be involved.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he has taken to ensure the continuation of adequate freight services in Scotland in the light of the current review of Speedlink services by British Rail.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend will consider all the implications for Scotland of any proposals which British Rail put to the Government following the review of its Speedlink services.

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations he made to British Rail prior to the meeting of the British Rail board on 1 November concerning the future of Speedlink services and the desirability of retaining first-class freight services in Scotland.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend met the chairman of British Rail, Sir Bob Reid, on 31 October 1990. A number of topics were discussed, including BR's present review of its Speedlink services.

Rail Electrification

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many meetings he has had with ScotRail management this year to discuss electrification of the railway lines between *(a)* Edinburgh and Glasgow via Polmont, *(b)* Edinburgh and Glasgow via Shotts and *(c)* Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend and I meet the chairman and other board members and senior management of British Rail and ScotRail from time to time. Contacts at official level also take place frequently. Discussions at such meetings cover a wide range of topics concerning rail services in Scotland, including electrification.

Mr. Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many representations he has received in favour of electrifying the railway lines between *(a)* Edinburgh and Glasgow via Polmont, *(b)* Edinburgh and Glasgow via Shotts and *(c)* Edinburgh and Aberdeen.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: My right hon. and learned Friend has received representations in 1990 from a number of organisations and individuals, including Members of Parliament, supporting further electrification of the railway network in Scotland. Decisions whether to invest in electrification schemes are, however, for British Rail working within the guidelines set by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport.

Ayr Road Route

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent representations he has received from hon. Members concerning the Ayr road route A77; and what reply he has given.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: I have received representations concerning the A77 Ayr road route from my right hon. Friend the Member for Ayr (Mr. Younger), my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Stewart) and the hon. Members for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Lambie) and for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. McKelvey). I shall reply to them in due course.

ENERGY

Piper Alpha Inquiry

8. **Mr. Douglas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on representations which he has received since the publication of the report on the Piper Alpha inquiry.

Mr. Wakeham: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made earlier today.

Energy Efficiency Office

12. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what range of programmes the Energy Efficiency Office has in place; whether any new initiatives are planned; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Energy Efficiency Office continues to offer a range of effective programmes designed to encourage the adoption of cost-effective energy efficiency measures in the home, industry and commerce.

In the coming months the EEO will be introducing the home energy efficiency scheme, which will provide assistance towards the cost of basic energy efficiency measures and advice to those on low incomes, and carrying forward a number of further initiatives that were announced in the White Paper on the environment.

United Kingdom Continental Shelf

13. **Mr. Rowe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the rate of capital investment in the United Kingdom continental shelf in the first quarter of 1990.

Mr. Wakeham: Capital investment in the first quarter of 1990 was £742 million, a massive increase of 46 per cent. on the corresponding quarter of 1989.

Lead-free Petrol

14. **Mr. Dunn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his latest estimate of the level of sales of lead-free petrol.

Mr. Moynihan: Currently about 36 per cent. of petrol sold is unleaded.

Tidal Barrages

16. **Sir Trevor Skeet:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how much support his Department is giving to environmental work relating to tidal barrages.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department has so far allocated about £1·8 million towards general environmental work relating to tidal energy barrages.

Further funding for studies on the Severn and Mersey barrage projects was announced in the summer. This included contributions for environmental work of £456,000 and £360,000, respectively, from my Department.

18. **Mr. Speller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what measures will be taken to assist in the feasibility studies for the construction of a Severn barrage or a Mersey barrage; and how much electricity each of these would generate.

Mr. Moynihan: My Department is making funds available of £0·46 million and £1·5 million for feasibility studies of tidal energy barrages on the Severn and Mersey estuaries respectively. It has been estimated that the barrage will provide approximately 8 per cent. of the present electricity requirements of England and Wales.

British Coal (Output)

17. **Mr. Alison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was British Coal's output per man year in 1989-90; what was the level in 1979-80; and if he will make a statement.

23. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was British Coal's output per man year in 1989-90; what was the level in 1979-80; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Wakeham: British Coal's output per man year was 1,080 tonnes in 1989-90, compared with 470 tonnes in 1979-80, an improvement of nearly 130 per cent.

Dounreay

19. **Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on progress to diversify the work of the Atomic Energy Authority at Dounreay.

Mr. Baldry: Dounreay has succeeded in attracting promising offshore oil work and is conducting a study, worth around £150,000, funded by the Department of Energy and others into the potential wind energy resource in Caithness and north Sutherland.

Opencast Mining

20. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he has received any representations regarding opencast mining being carried out under interim development orders.

Mr. Baldry: I have received no representations. Questions relating to planning matters are for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment.

Offshore Oil Employees

21. **Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on blacklisting of offshore oil employees by oil companies and contractors.

Mr. Moynihan: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sillars) earlier today.

Electricity Privatisation

22. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement about electricity privatisation.

Mr. Wakeham: Good progress continues to be made. The Government are on target for the flotation of the 12 regional electricity companies in early December and more than 6 million people have registered with the electricity share information office.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what risks are the electricity privatisation underwriters being given to carry and what risks have the Government agreed to accept.

Mr. Wakeham: The underwriters of the sale of the 12 regional electricity companies will be expected to carry the same risks as underwriters have carried in recent privatisations except that in the event of an outbreak of hostilities in the middle east there will be arrangements under which the offer can be terminated.

Union of Democratic Mineworkers

24. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he last met the president of the Union of Democratic Mineworkers to discuss the future of the coal industry.

Mr. Wakeham: I meet the president of the UDM from time to time when we discuss all aspects of the coal industry of current interest.

Pensioners' Homes

25. **Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will estimate the proportion of pensioners' homes lacking basic draughtproofing or insulation.

Mr. Baldry: Surveys indicate that of those households where the housewife is aged 65 or over, around 10 per cent. have no loft insulation and some 70 per cent. lack draughtproofing.

Electricity Industry

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total spent on staff training by the electricity supply industry in each year since 1984-85 at constant prices.

Mr. Wakeham: This is a matter for the industry.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many apprentices were taken on by the area electricity boards and the Central Electricity Generating Board, respectively, in each year since 1984-85.

Mr. Wakeham: This is a matter for the regional electricity companies and the successor companies to the CEGB.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what discussions he has had about the establishment of a futures market for electricity.

Mr. Wakeham: None, but officials have met representatives from the London futures and options exchange to discuss their ideas relating to the establishment of a futures market for electricity.

Nuclear-generated Electricity

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will now require a reassessment of the price of 5·7 per kWh in respect of nuclear-generated electricity, as submitted by Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear as part of the application to the European Commission seeking approval of the section 33 (Electricity Act 1989) levy regulation order in February 1990, in the light of the losses announced by Nuclear Electric and Scottish Nuclear; and if he will make a full statement.

Mr. Baldry: No.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy in respect of the submission by his Department of an application to the European Commission seeking approval of the section 33 (Electricity Act 1989) levy regulation order, in February 1990 *(a)* on what date was the price submitted by Nuclear Electric of 5·7p/kWh determined and *(b)* what input his Department had in determining the price of 5·7p/kWh; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: The Government oversaw the negotiation of the contracts between Nuclear Electric and the regional electricity companies. Details of those negotiations and discussions with the European Commission are confidential.

Fuel Choice

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether he will make a statement on public sector fuel choice.

Mr. Baldry: The Government believe that decisions on fuel choice should be based on commercial criteria, and that no individual fuel should be give preference over others in the appraisal of future public sector projects. The terms of the statement made to the House on 12 April 1965, *Official Report*, columns 959-60, by the then Minister for Power, which favoured the choice of solid fuel in public buildings, will therefore no longer apply.

Vectis Energy Systems

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what recent representations he has received from Vectis Energy Systems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: Vectis Energy Systems has recently suggested to my Department that the criteria by which Nuclear Electric plc was able to contract within the non-fossil fuel obligation were less demanding than those applied to renewables operators seeking to contract within the obligation. However, I can assure the hon. Member that the Secretary of State took all relevant matters into account before certifying the contracts between the 12 regional electricity companies and Nuclear Electric plc as meeting the requirements of the legislation.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many applications he has received to date submitting schemes for inclusion in the renewable tranche of the non-fossil fuel obligation; and what is the total generating capacity of these schemes.

Mr. Baldry: In fulfilment of the initial order setting a non-fossil fuel obligation in respect of renewable sources of electricity generating capacity, the 12 regional electricity companies have contracted for 75 projects with an installed capacity that will build up to some 170 MW. My right hon. Friend intends to bring forward the first additional renewables tranche next year.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many, and what percentage, of those applicants who have submitted schemes for inclusion in the renewable tranche of the non-fossil fuel obligation have written to express reservations about the operation of the non-fossil fuel obligation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: In consultation with OFFER and the 12 regional electricity companies, my Department is currently reviewing the procedures for making orders setting a non-fossil fuel obligation in respect of renewable sources of electricity generating capacity, in the light of experience gained in making the initial renewables order. In this context comments have been invited from a number of organisations. The conclusions of this review will be taken into account in making the arrangements for the first additional order, about which my right hon. Friend proposes to make an announcement by the end of this year.

Hydro-electric Power

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what range of prices are being offered to private hydro-electricity generators in Wales, the north of England and the south of England.

Mr. Baldry: This is a commercial matter for the electricity industry.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what capacity of hydro-electric power is installed at present in Wales, the north of England and the south of England; and what are his plans to encourage further generation by this means.

Mr. Baldry: The total declared net capacity of hydro-electric schemes connected to the grid in England and Wales is 110 MW as at 31 March 1990. This figure excludes pumped storage schemes. Very small schemes may account for a further capacity of about 10 MW. Further hydro-electric generation in England and Wales is being encouraged by the following means:

1. The Water Act 1989 abolishes water abstraction charges for small schemes of under 5 MW—effective 1 April 1990.
2. From 1990, independent commercial water power electricity generators will be rated on the same "formula" basis as the successors of the Central Electricity Generating Board.

3. My Department has made provision for assistance with the funding of feasibility studies for small hydro-electric schemes, as part of a continuing programme of research, development and demonstration.
4. A total of 26 hydro-electric schemes were included in the first tranche of renewable energy projects under the non-fossil fuel obligation—NFFO. These were given approval by the Director General of Electricity Supply on 3 October.
5. It is planned to make available over the next few years further tranches of capacity for renewables-sourced electricity generation under the NFFO. At least another 600 MW will be made available. The next order under the NFFO will be made next year.

Electricity Prices

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will give for each regional electricity company the maximum permitted domestic tariff increases in this and the next financial year, respectively.

Mr. Wakeham: Prices are a matter for the regional electricity companies subject to their statutory and licence requirements. It is for the Director General of Electricity Supply to monitor and enforce licence conditions.

Progressive Dividend Policy

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what criteria his Department uses to define progressive dividend policy.

Mr. Wakeham: The dividend policy statements included in a prospectus are a matter for the directors of the company.

Regional Electricity Companies

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of the property asset value of each regional electricity company is represented by their retail shop chain.

Mr. Wakeham: The information requested is commercially confidential.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy why the net assets of the National Grid Company were allocated between each regional electricity company on the basis of the net assets according to the current cost accounting convention of both the National Grid Company and each regional electricity company.

Mr. Wakeham: The allocation of NGC net assets by reference to the current cost assets of the regional electricity companies was felt to be a fair and acceptable allocation method.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is the total estimated cost of the 12·5 per cent. bonus to be paid to some directors of regional electricity companies.

Mr. Wakeham: I will write to the hon. Member with the information.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his Department's estimate of the extent to which regional electricity company directors' salaries are below private sector rates.

Mr. Wakeham: It will be for the companies to consider this after privatisation.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when in October the National Grid Company issued a property clawback debenture to him.

Mr. Wakeham: The debenture was issued on 2 November 1990.

Salter's Duck

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on his departmental figures relating to grant for the wave power device known as Salter's duck.

Mr. Moynihan: A major programme of wave energy research and development funded by the Department of Energy was carried out from 1974 to 1983 and cost approximately £15·5 million. Including follow on work after the main programme ended support provided for the Salter duck amounted to £1·8 million.

The research programme is described in ETSU R26, published in March 1985. A copy of the report has been placed in the Library of the House.

The Department is now updating its earlier wave energy studies and a review is in hand to examine the prospects for wave energy across the whole range from shoreline to large-scale offshore devices. Two progress reports have already been circulated for comment to the wave research and development community and also have been placed in the Library of the House.

It is intended that an interim report will be published early in 1991 and a final report published later that year. The interim report will address offshore wave energy including progress on the assessment of Professor Salter's device.

Energy Expenditure

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what was the total expenditure on energy in the United Kingdom by end users in 1989; what proportion of that expenditure was tax; and what proportion of that expenditure was gross domestic product.

Mr. Wakeham: The figures for 1989 are shown in the table. Corresponding figures for 1986 to 1988 are also given, as there have been revisions to the data since the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Gordon (Mr. Bruce) on 26 July 1989.

Year	*Expenditure on energy by final users (£ million)*	*Tax as a proportion of expenditure on energy*[1] *(per cent.)*	*Energy expenditure as a proportion of GDP*[2] *(per cent.)*
1986	37,860	22·6	9·9
1987	38,525	23·5	9·1
1988	39,015	24·8	8·3
1989	42,150	24·6	8·2

[1] Taxes—duty and VAT—on petroleum products. No other fuels were subject to tax in the years shown.
[2] Calculated using the average measure of GDP at current market prices.
Source: Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics and Central Statistical Office figures for GDP.

Flow Charts

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether the energy flow chart scheduled for publication in mid-1990 to which his answer of 24 July 1989, *Official Report*, columns *578-79*, referred has been produced; and if he will place a copy in the Library.

Mr. Wakeham: The chart of "United Kingdom Energy Flows 1989" was published on 26 July 1990, with the "Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1990". A copy of the Digest, including a copy of the flow chart, was provided to the Library of the House following publication.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Day: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will report on the progress of the interdepartmental ministerial committee on energy efficiency.

Mr. Wakeham: The committee met on 17 October. Its aims are to raise the profile of energy efficiency, to encourage an energy efficient lifestyle at home, at work and in travel and to set an example in the public sector. The committee has published the first annual report of the campaign to improve energy efficiency on the Government estate and all Ministers have agreed to promote energy efficiency in their many contacts with local authorities, industry and commerce. The committee will provide a forum for bringing to people's attention both the steps Government are taking and the steps they themselves can take to improve energy efficiency.

DEFENCE

RAF Aircraft

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will introduce a research programme to examine the use of radar absorbent material on aircraft operated by the Royal Air Force.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: It is not our policy to give details of current or future research programmes.

RAF Kemble

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current number of *(a)* service and *(b)* civilian personnel stationed at RAF Kemble.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently two RAF officers, 19 United States Air Force personnel, 62 United States Department of Defence civilian employees and 422 civilians directly employed by the Ministry of Defence at RAF Kemble. A further 30 staff are employed by the Property Services Agency.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations have taken place with the relevant local authorities regarding his Department's civilian employees currently working at RAF Kemble.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence is in contact with North Wiltshire and Cotswold district councils on the issues arising from the United States decision to withdraw from RAF Kemble, including the position of the Department's employees on the station.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations have taken place with the United States Government regarding the future uses of RAF Kemble.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Following the announcement on 18 September of the United States Air Force's intention to withdraw from RAF Kemble in 1992, the Ministry of Defence is considering possible future uses for the site.

Portland Naval Base

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what consideration has been given to *(a)* closing down and *(b)* reducing the size of Portland naval base as a result of the "Options for Change" study;

(2) if he will make a statement on the future of Portland naval base:

(3) what assessment has been made of the future strategic requirements for the capabilities of Portland naval base.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Our assessment of the continued requirement for the Portland naval base, as with all other parts of the naval estate, will depend on forthcoming decisions on the future support and management of the RN as part of the work on "Options for Change". The Government will announce their intentions as soon as these considerations are completed.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current number of *(a)* service and *(b)* civilian personnel stationed at Portland naval base.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently 506 service personnel and 710 civilians employed at the Portland naval base complex, which includes the naval air station HMS Osprey.

Overseas Voters

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to inform the wives of service men living outside the United Kingdom of their right to a postal vote; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Representation of the People Act gives service personnel and their spouse living overseas the right to a proxy vote but not to a postal vote. Spouses living overseas are informed of their right to a proxy vote in a number of ways.

Royal Navy Equipment Exhibition

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when and where the next Royal Navy equipment exhibition will be held; and on what dates it will be open to *(a)* all overseas customers, *(b)* the press and *(c)* the general public.

Mr. Alan Clark: The next Royal Navy equipment exhibition will be held at Whale island, Portsmouth on 1 to 6 September 1991. Sunday 1 September will be the press day. VIPs and overseas guests will attend on 2 to 4 September. The remaining two days are trade days, although overseas customers will still be welcome. The exhibition is not open to members of the public.

ENVIRONMENT

Waste Materials (Imports)

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list the extent of the importation of waste materials for the United Kingdom during the 1988-89 year by major subject heading; and if he will divide this data as to whether they are toxic or other waste.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Information on the importation of hazardous waste into England by type of waste has been collated since the introduction of the Transfrontier Shipment of Hazardous Waste Regulations in October 1988. No information is collated on imports of non-hazardous waste.

The provision of similar information for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales, my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland respectively.

The following table shows the imports of hazardous waste for the period 1 October 1988 to 31 March 1989.

Waste types	*Tonnes imported*
Aerosol	6·5
AZO dyes	1·2
Battery waste	4·5
Carbon charcoal waste	21·8
Celite waste	64·8
Cellulose waste	3·2
Chlorinated solvents	46·0
Chrome residues	3·9
Copper sulphate	0·5
Cyanide waste	0·2
Detergent/soap waste	49·2
Distillation residue	596·4
Filter cake	1,710·6
Fluegas/furnace soot	789·5
Fly-ash	201·0
Glass powder waste	1·4
Glue waste	35·2
Clycerine waste	32·0
Graphite waste	11·6
Hydroxide sludge	384·6
Industrial ink waste	238·1
Inorganic waste	18·9
Iron Hydroxide/oxides	139·7
Laboratory waste	8·6
Latex rubber waste	26·2
Miscellaneous waste	76·8
Miscellaneous chemical waste	254·6
Nerol (Toluene waste)	34·0
Nickel compounds	8·6
Nickel baths sludge	0·5
Non-ferrous metal scrap	21·8
Oil/wax/grease/fats/paint	45·0
Organic halogenated waste	0·1
Organic waste (mix)	54·8
Paint waste	2,118·5
PolychloroBiphenyl (PCB)	190·7
PCB/transformers carcass	14·4
Pesticides	5·0
Pharmaceutical waste	9·0
Phosphoric acid	120·0
Photocopying liquids	0·4
Polyester waste	3·4
Polymer waste (PVC)	4·6
Polyurethane waste	49·3
Printing waste	9·6
Resin waste	51·5
Sludge waste	52·6
Sodium chloride	16·1
Sodium benzosulfonate	29·6
Sulphuric acid	6·0
Factory sweeping	111·8
Tar-residue/liquid	0·2
Vanadium catalyst	51·9
Varnish waste	0·3
Zinc salts/waste	25·4
Totals	7,762·1

Pesticides

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to prevent the contamination of groundwater supplies by pesticides; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My Department announced in a consultation paper on 31 October the Government's proposals for a national classification scheme for dangerous substances, including pesticides, which must be prevented from entering or must be limited before reaching groundwater. Department of the Environment circular 20/90 issued on the same day describes the steps to be taken by controlling authorities in respect of these dangerous substances.

The Government are advised on the use of pesticides by the independent Advisory Committee on Pesticides (ACP). Only pesticides approved by Ministers may be used. The ACP's current review programme of pesticides was announced on 1 November and one of the matters that it will take into consideration is the potential for pesticides to leach into groundwater.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the Health and Safety Commission, and my Department prepared jointly a code of practice for the safe use of pesticides on farms and holdings which was issued last May.

Coal-fired Power Stations

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has made an assessment of the possible application of part I of the Environmental Protection Act for coal-fired power stations; whether the BATNEEC—best available technique not entailing excessive cost—provisions will require the fitting of flue gas desulphurisation equipment to such stations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The requirements of the Government's plan for implementing the large combustion plants directive, to be made under part I of the Environmental Protection Acts, will lead to the retrofitting of flue gas desulphurisation to three major coal-fired power stations. The Government will also lay regulations setting tight emission standards for new plants.

The chief inspector of Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution will shortly be issuing for consultation draft guidance on techniques for controlling emissions from large combustion plants.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what procedures exist for the reclassification of high-level nuclear waste as intermediate-level waste;

what is his best estimate of the length of time required to pass before such reclassification is scientifically justified; who is empowered to take such a decision; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No procedures exist for the reclassification of high-level radioactive waste as intermediate-level radioactive waste. The Radioactive Substances Act 1960 requires that radioactive waste must be authorised by the appropriate regulatory authorities for disposal. They will specify the means of disposal. Further information on the Government's policy for the management of radioactive waste is set out in the Government's recent Environment White Paper, "This Common Inheritance".

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what research has been conducted into the technical feasibility of disposing of the nuclear waste which is currently defined as high-level waste in the deep repository which is currently planned for intermediate-level waste disposal; and what research is planned.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: No such research is planned as there are no proposals to dispose of high-level radioactive waste in any repository for intermediate-level radioactive waste.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 13 November 1990

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prisoners (Letters)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of letters that an inmate in prisons in England and Wales is allowed to send out per week if the inmate pays for the postage of his or her letter.

Mrs. Rumbold: The minimum entitlement of letters that a convicted inmate may send out at his or her own expense is one per week—two in the case of young offenders. However, inmates at establishments where only a random sample of correspondence is read are usually able to send out more letters than the minimum entitlement. Inmates at establishments where there is no routine reading of correspondence may send as many letters as they like. Unconvicted inmates may pay for and send as many letters as they wish.

Disabled People (Access)

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to ensure that cinema regulations are drafted to ensure that people with guide dogs, and wheelchair users, can be admitted to any performances.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Cinematograph (Safety) Regulations 1955 do not prohibit access by people with guide dogs or wheelchairs. They provide that invalids may be permitted, notwithstanding other requirements of the regulations, with the consent of and subject to any conditions imposed by the licensing authority. Practical guidance on the accommodation of wheelchair users is contained in the Home Department's booklet "Recommendations on Safety in Cinemas" which was published in 1955. It is for cinema proprietors to make appropriate arrangements for wheelchair users in consultation with the licensing authority. In new buildings such access must be provided, but whether wheelchair users can in practice be given access and accommodated in existing buildings may well depend on the design and structure of the building.

Prisons (Visitors Centres)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the amount of money allocated and paid by his Department to visitors centres in prisons in England and Wales in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The amounts allocated and paid towards running costs by the Department to visitors' centres at prisons in England and Wales are shown in the table:

Financial Year	£
1987-88	12,000
1988-89	12,000
1989-90	49,000

In the current financial year, 1990-91, grants totalling £103,000 will be paid.

Boundary Commission

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the programme for the Boundaries Commission's examination of parliamentary constituencies, with particular reference to Kent.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Boundary Commission for England intends to start its general review of constituencies early in 1991. It will become clearer as the review proceeds when it will look at any particular area. The commission is required to report between 1993 and 1998.

Rwakitangam Turyamureeba

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why Rwakitangam Turyamureeba, a citizen of Uganda, has been held in detention since 17 May; and when a decision will be reached on his application for political asylum.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Mr. Turyamureeba has been detained because the immigration officer, having considered all the circumstances, could not be satisfied that he would comply with the terms of any temporary admission granted. It is expected that a final decision will be reached shortly.

Malicious Communications

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he will list all cases of prosecutions brought since 1988 under the Malicious Communications Act; what was the nature of the offence in each case; and what was the outcome of those prosecutions.

Mr. John Patten: In England and Wales in 1988 there were three prosecutions under the Malicious Communications Act 1988. Of these, two were convicted; one fined and the other sentenced to immediate custody. Information is not collected centrally on the nature of the offence. Data for 1989 are not yet available.

Football Matches

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department plans to issue a circular to police authorities advising them on whether to make a full economic charge for officers engaged at football matches; what factors are taken into account in assessing the full economic cost; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have consulted the football authorities, the local authority associations and police representative bodies on the terms of a Home Office circular advising police authorities to recover as far as practicable the full cost of providing police officers inside football grounds. We are now considering the comments made on the draft and hope to issue the circular as soon as practicable.

Race Relations

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the total Government expenditure on funding under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966 for 1989-90 and 1990-91, itemised by borough and identifying for each borough the amount of education expenditure for those financial years.

Mrs. Rumbold: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to a question from the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 23 October at columns *126-28* for the amount of grant paid to each borough in 1989-90, under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966.

The figures for grant to be paid in 1990-91 are not yet available.

Precise figures for the proportion of grant paid for education expenditure to each authority are not available, but it is estimated that education provision accounts for approximately 80 per cent. of total grant.

Plant Theft

Mr. Shersby: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress that has been made by the working party on plant theft.

Mr. John Patten *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* The working party agreed proposals announced in September 1989 for a voluntary scheme to combat theft by manufacturers marking new plant with a 17-digit identifying number and issuing plant identity documents. The working party is giving further consideration to means of promoting implementation of the scheme nationally and internationally.

Constituencies

Mr. Moate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish a table showing in descending order of size the electorate of each parliamentary constituency, based on the 1990 register.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is published in "Electoral Statistics 1990"—Series EL no 17—a copy of which is available in the Library. Table 1.3 lists, in order, the 20 parliamentary constituencies with the largest and smallest electorates in 1990 and table 1.4 shows the 1990 rank order of each constituency in the United Kingdom.

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Housing Law

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Attorney-General whether the Lord Chancellor has any plans to introduce legislation to provide procedures for the resolution of housing law cases by means of arbitration or other alternative forms of dispute resolution; and if he will make a statement.

The Solicitor-General: As part of his five year programme for the implementation of the civil justice review, my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor intends to introduce a new housing action based on the informal arbitration procedure used in small claims cases in the county courts. The precise scope and form of the new procedure, which will not be introduced before 1992, will depend on the results of prior consultation.

Anti-Semitic Literature

Mr. Janner: To ask the Attorney-General whether he will list all cases of prosecutions brought by the Crown prosecution service since 1986, under the Public Order Acts, in respect of the distribution of anti-Semitic literature; what month and year and in which courts the cases were heard; and what was the outcome of those prosecutions.

The Attorney-General: Fifteen prosecutions for incitement to racial hatred have been brought under section 5A of the Public Order Act 1936, or under part III of the Public Order Act 1986, in 1986 and subsequent years. Of these, 11 prosecutions included allegations that anti-Jewish material had been published or distributed. Proceedings have been begun, but not concluded, in a further case; this too involves an allegation that anti-Jewish material has been distributed. The details of prosecutions that have been concluded are as follows:

Name of Defendant	*Date*	*Court*	*Result*
J. Kinnon	March 1986	Dudley Crown Court	Convicted
R. Trehane[1]	March 1986	Bodmin Crown Court	Convicted
D. Cullingford[1]			Convicted
R. Bearsford-Walker[1]			Convicted
L. Bearsford-Walker[1]			Convicted
K. Rowe[1]			Convicted
S. Knight[1]			Convicted
A. Shotton[1]	April 1986	Maidstone Crown Court	Acquitted
A. Waite[1]			Acquitted
D. Owens[1]	May 1986	Leeds Crown Court	Convicted
J. Tyndall[1]	July 1986	Southwark Crown Court	Convicted
J. Morse[1]			Convicted
M. Atkinson	May 1988	Chertsey Magistrates Court	Convicted
J. Kinnon	August 1988	Dudley Crown Court	Convicted
J. Kinnon	February 1990	Dudley Crown Court	Bound over

[1] Denotes a prosecution involving an allegation that anti-Jewish material was published or distributed.

ENVIRONMENT

Litter

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he proposes to issue the code of practice on litter and refuse foreshadowed in part IV of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Mr. Trippier: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today laid before Parliament the statutory code of practice on litter and refuse envisaged in section 89(7) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. A copy is being sent to all local authorities and other interested bodies.

Part IV of the Environmental Protection Act underpins the Government's drive to tackle the serious problem of litter, which scars our towns and our countryside. The Act places a duty on local authorities and certain other bodies throughout Great Britain to keep land clear of litter and refuse. We intend that the duty will apply to local authorities and the Crown from 1 April 1991; there will be certain transitional provisions in relation to authorities who have already let street cleaning contracts under the Local Government Act 1988. We will shortly be making an announcement about the other bodies to whom we propose that the duty should apply.

The Act also increases the maximum fine for littering from £400 to £1,000 and gives powers to local authorities to introduce fixed penalty schemes, to designate litter control areas and to issue street litter control notices.

The code of practice is another important part of our war against litter. It is designed to give practical guidance to local authorities and other bodies who will be covered by the litter duty. It was drawn up with the help of an advisory group containing experts from local authorities and other organisations.

The code breaks new ground in its approach to litter clearance. For the first time, it sets out standards of cleanliness which should be achievable in different types of location under different circumstances. This should help to establish common standards of cleanliness throughout Britain; and will make it possible for an organisation under the litter duty to assess its performance.

The code also concentrates on how clean land is rather than how often it is cleaned. This should change the approach taken by many authorities up till now. The emphasis will no longer be on sweeping frequencies but on targeting litter blackspots while reducing sweeping frequencies in areas which all but escape litter. The motto is "If it isn't dirty, don't clean it".

I know that the Government's determination to deal with litter is shared by members of the public and by local authorities up and down the country. The code which we have published today should help to translate that determination into results.

Tourism

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities which will benefit from the increase in support granted to assist tourist areas.

Mr. Key: The proposed increase in the weight given to the tourist element in the 1991-92 standard spending assessment formula benefits the following local authorities.

Allerdale
Alnwick
Arun
Avon
Babergh
Bassetlaw
Bath
Berkshire
Berwick-upon-Tweed
Blackpool
Bournemouth
Breckland
Brighton
Bristol
Cambridge
Canterbury
Caradon
Carrick
Chester
Chichester
Christchurch
City of London
Cleethorpes
Cornwall
Craven
Cumbria
Derbyshire Dales
Devon
Dorset
Dover
East Devon
East Hampshire
East Lindsey
East Sussex
East Yorkshire
Eastbourne
Eden
Exeter
Fylde
Great Yarmouth
Guildford
Hambleton
Hampshire
Harrogate
Hastings
Havant
Hereford
High Peak
Hillingdon
Horsham
Humberside
Ipswich
Isle of Wight
Isles of Scilly
Kennet
Kensington and Chelsea
Kent
King's Lynn and West Norfolk
Lancashire
Lancaster
Leicester
Leominster
Lewes
Lincoln
Lincolnshire
Liverpool
Luton
Macclesfield
Malvern Hills
Manchester
Medina
Mendip
Mole Valley
New Forest
Norfolk
North Bedfordshire
North Cornwall
North Devon
North Dorset
North Hertfordshire

North Norfolk
North Yorkshire
Northumberland
Norwich
Nottingham
Oxford
Penwith
Plymouth
Poole
Portsmouth
Preston
Purbeck
Reading
Restormel
Richmondshire
Rochford
Rother
Salisbury
Scarborough
Sedgemoor
Shepway
Slough
Somerset
South Bedfordshire
South Hams
South Herefordshire
South Lakeland
South Shropshire
South Wight
Southampton
Stratford on Avon
Suffolk
Suffolk Coastal
Taunton Deane
Teignbridge
Tendring
Tewkesbury
Thanet
Torbay
Torridge
Tunbridge Wells
Tynedale
Vale Royal
Waveney
West Devon
West Dorset
West Somerset
West Sussex
Westminster
Weymouth and Portland
Windsor and Maidenhead
Woodspring
York

Community Charge

Mr. Hardy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list those local authorities which he now expects to levy a community charge of below £200 in 1991 and those levying such a charge in 1990.

Mr. Key: The Government have not made any predictions of community charge levels for particular authorities for 1991-92. Wandsworth and Westminster set charges below £200 for 1990-91.

Urban Development Corporations

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what alternative strategy for urban development corporations he is recommending to deal with recession in the property market; if he will now give local authorities, community development trusts and local businesses land and resources to enable them to come forward with alternative schemes to provide local employment and affordable housing in urban development corporation areas; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: I am content with the strategies currently being pursued by the urban development corporations.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which individual urban development corporation projects have been postponed; which individual projects have been cancelled; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: Urban development corporations budget for a wide range of projects. The precise mix is constantly under review and revision in the light of changing circumstances and priorities.

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much land is currently owned by urban development corporations in England; how long it has been in their ownership; and what plans there are for its development by the private sector.

Mr. Portillo *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* Urban development corporations currently own about 2,000 hectares which they will put to a wide variety of development, environmental and infrastructure uses. Information on how long they have held each plot of land is not readily available.

Vacant Public Land

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which local authorities in London were sent copies of the consultation paper encouraging the use of vacant public land; and when they were despatched.

Mr. Atkins: The consultation paper was sent to the local authority association on 12 September. I understand that some authorities have since received copies from their association. Eight authorities in London have requested and been sent copies directly by my Department.

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many submissions he has received to the consultation paper on encouraging the use of vacant public land; and how many were from local authorities.

Mr. Atkins: A total of 73 responses had been received by 9 November. These included five from the local authority associations and 22 from individual authorities.

SERPLAN Statement

Mr. Durant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how he intends to respond to the SERPLAN regional statement, "A New Strategy for the South East".

Mr. Michael Spicer: I welcome SERPLAN's regional statement which is an important step towards developing new regional planning guidance for the south-east. The existing regional guidance is set out in my Department's planning policy guidance note No. 9 of February 1989. Such guidance is intended to provide a framework for the preparation of structure plans by county councils. The Government will now review the existing guidance in the light of SERPLAN's statement. We will also take account of any relevant views expressed by other persons or organisations. Those wishing their views to be taken into account should send them to my Department by the end of 1990. To assist consideration of the issues concerned, my Department will be holding a conference early in 1991, at

which invited parties will be able to express their views. We will later publish—for consultation—draft regional planning guidance for the south-east.

Satellite Television

Mrs. Gorman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether, following the merger of British Satellite Broadcasting and Sky Television, he proposes to amend the revised planning controls over satellite television antennas that he announced on 1 November.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Clearly the position on satellite dishes has changed with the recently announced merger of BSB and Sky Television and the proposed adoption of the Astra satellite broadcasting system. My right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for the Environment and for Wales will therefore be reviewing the proposed changes to the General Development Order in the light of developments.

Ozone Layer

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the effects of using methylene chloride in regard to Her Majesty's Government's policies towards protecting the ozone layer.

Mr. Trippier *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* Methylene chloride is not thought to make any significant contribution to ozone depletion. It can be used as a substitute for CFC 11 in the manufacture of flexible foam.

Somerset Levels

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his policy in respect of the protection of the Somerset levels.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* We will continue to ensure that an appropriate balance is maintained between nature conservation interests, the needs of the rural community, and all other interests of the area.

Inland Waterways

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans he has to require the clearance from inland waterways of rubbish which neither threatens flood capacity nor inhibits the passage of barges; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* Section 89 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 will place a new duty on local authorities, designated statutory undertakers—the definition of designated statutory undertakers given in the Act includes

"any person authorised by an enactment to carry on any canal, inland navigation, dock, harbour or pier undertaking"

and other bodies—to keep their land clear of litter and refuse. We expect the duty to apply to all urban waterway towpaths and embankments to which the public are entitled or permitted to have access. Land in this context does not include water. We consider that existing legislation contains adequate provision to deal with the problem of litter on and within bodies of water.

Leybucht Bay

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the estimated cost to public funds of his Department's legal representation in support of the German Federal Republic against the European Commission in the Leybucht Bay case.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* I regret that this information is not available.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will state in the *Official Report* the bases of the figures and results used in the diagram on page 73 of Cm 1200, "Contribution of transport to CO2 levels" with particular reference to the comparable figures shown therein relating to the London underground and motor cars.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

I shall write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

ENERGY

Electricity Generation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what proportion of electricity generated in Great Britain in 1989 was generated from coal, oil, gas, nuclear and renewables, respectively.

Mr. Wakeham: The proportions of fuel used to generate electricity in 1989 in Great Britain are as follows:

Fuel used in electricity generation[1]	*Percentage share*
Coal	71
Nuclear	21
Oil[2]	6
Renewables[3]	2

The amount of gas used to generate electricity accounts for less than 0·1 per cent. of the total.

[1]Coverage relates to those generating companies formerly comprising the public electricity supply system in Great Britain: National Power, PowerGen, Nuclear Electric, National Grid Company, Scottish Power, Scottish Hydro, Scottish Nuclear, Midlands Electricity and South Western Electricity.

[2]Including oil used in gas turbine and diesel plant or for lighting up coal fired boilers, and Orimulsion.

[3]Mainly natural flow hydro.

Energy Initiative Club

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy by whom Dr. James Smith was advised not to address the Energy Initiative Club on 25 October.

Mr. Wakeham: This is a matter for Dr. James Smith.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) if he plans to ask the European Commission to extend beyond 1998 the present favourable terms for the purchase by public electricity supply companies of electricity generated from renewable sources;

(2) if he plans to approach the European Commission to extend beyond 1998 the present favourable terms for the purchasing of non-fossil fuel generated electricity.

Mr. Baldry: My Department will continue to keep under review whether to seek the European Commission's approval to extend the fossil fuel levy beyond 1998. However, I am confident that the 12 regional electricity companies in England and Wales currently have the flexibilities that they need in order to be able to offer bankable contracts to renewables operators seeking to contract within the non-fossil fuel obligation.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy whether any of the companies advising him on electricity privatisation have been criticised by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors since 1979 in reports which were not published.

Mr. Wakeham: I cannot disclose details of unpublished reports.

Non-fossil Fuel Purchasing Agency

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any plans to increase the scope and funding for the Non-Fossil Fuel Purchasing Agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for the 12 regional electricity companies in England and Wales, whose agent the NFPA is.

Electricity Generating Stations

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will list those companies which have sought consent for projects for gas-fired electricity generating stations showing in the case of consortia the constituent companies.

Mr. Wakeham: Since the Electricity Act 1989 came into force on 31 March 1990 I have granted my consent under section 36 for the construction and operation of the following gas turbine stations.

	Company
Killingholme "A", Humberside	National Power plc
Wilton, Cleveland	Teeside Power Co. Ltd. (Enron/ICI)

I am currently considering applications for my consent under section 36 to construct and operate the following gas turbine stations.

	Company
Little Barford, Bedfordshire	National Power plc
Rye House, Hertfordshire	PowerGen plc
Shotton, Clwyd	Deeside Power Development Co. Ltd. (Asea Brown Boveri Energy Ventures Ltd.)
Keadby, Humberside	Energy Resources Ltd.
Plymouth, Devon	PowerGen plc
Staythorpe "C", Nottinghamshire	National Power plc
Rugby, Warwickshire	Rugby Power Co. Ltd. (John Brown Engineering Ltd., East Midlands Electricity)
Angle Bay, Pembrokeshire	Texaco Ltd.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Cattle Carcases

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what facilities there are for the disposal of carcases of dead cattle in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Brooke: In disposing of carcases of dead animals, agriculture producers in Northern Ireland have options of burial on their own land, subject to meeting environmental requirements; an arrangement with a registered protein processor or his agent; or disposal at authorised land-fill sites by arrangement with licensees. In addition there is a limited kennel market outlet.

Milk Industry

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the industrial development boards have made representations to countries in the middle east to accept milk products from Northern Ireland; what support is being given to Pritchitt Foods in Newtownards; how many redundancies have been announced at its plant in Newtownards; what is the impact of the Gulf crisis on exports by the Northern Ireland milk industry; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer given him by my hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on 24 October at column *211*. Representations to countries in the middle east to accept milk products from Northern Ireland have been made by the Ministry for Agriculture and Food, rather than the Industrial Development Board, as the restrictions are the result of bovine spongiform encephalopathy.

Since 1984 the IDB has offered financial assistance to Pritchitt Foods totalling £1,941,040 towards three capital investment projects and three R and D projects. In addition, the company has been offered financial support totalling £125,970 on nine applications for marketing support assistance.

Since 1 January 1988, the IDB's ability to assist the company financially has been constrained by EC restrictions on member states grant aiding dairy companies manufacturing the type of products in which Pritchitt Foods specialises.

On 15 October 1990 the company announced 40 redundancies.

One other Northern Ireland dairy company has been affected by the embargo on trade with Iraq and only in a marginal way. It has succeeded in diverting its products to alternative export markets.

Parking, Donaghadee

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many days in October traffic wardens visited New street, Donaghadee; what arrangements have been made for business men to park their vehicles for loading at New street; what alternative proposals he has for a new central car park in Donaghadee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Needham *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* Detailed information on the frequency with which traffic

wardens visit individual streets in Donaghadee is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Roads (Restriction of waiting) Order (NI) 1982 permits a vehicle to wait on a public road for as long as may be necessary to enable goods to be loaded and unloaded. The roads service is currently investigating potential car parking sites in the centre of Donaghadee.

PRIME MINISTER

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 13 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, including one with Professor Landsbergis of Lithuania. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

TRANSPORT

M1

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will be able to advise the House of the result of the experiment involving the trial of 70 mph repeater signs on the M1 motorway.

Mr. Chope: The results of the experiment from September 1988 to September 1989 involving the trial of 70 mph repeater signs on a 20-mile stretch of the M1 are available in a report published by the Transport and Road Research Laboratory entitled "An assessment of the effect of 70 mph repeater signs on the M1 motorway". I have placed a copy of this report in the Library of the House.

EC Transport Council

Sir Rhodes Boyson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the outcome of the meeting with the European Community Transport Council on 30 October.

Mr. Parkinson: My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Transport attended the meeting of the European Council of Transport Ministers which was held in Luxembourg on 30 October.

Most of the items considered by the Council concerned inland transport. The Council discussed the recent disputes affecting certain border crossings and the transit negotiations with third countries—Austria, Switzerland and Yugoslavia. It also discussed measures to be taken in the event of a crisis in the road haulage sector and an increase in the Community quotas of road haulage permits but did not come to any firm decisions on these two items. They will be discussed again at the December Transport Council. The Council did agree, however, that the Commission should be given a mandate, in consultation with the member states, to negotiate with non-EC countries on the alignment of the drivers hours' rules in the Community and AETR—the European agreement concerning the work of crews of vehicles engaged in international road transport). The Council also agreed a resolution on setting up a high level group to study the prospects for a European combined transport network.

At the June Transport Council, member states had reached agreement in principle on an ad hoc three-year programme for EC transport infrastructure funding until the end of 1992. Some points, however, had remained outstanding, and the Council on 30 October made good progress towards resolving these. It now seems likely that the proposal will be finally adopted shortly

The Council reached a general agreement on the text of a report to the European Council concerning the memorandum produced by the Netherlands entitled "A Transport Policy for Europe". The report welcomed the objective reaffirmed by the memorandum that an internal market in the transport sector should be achieved between now and 1 January 1993, and set out the Council's view of the lines along which Community transport policy should be developed. The Council also discussed fiscal harmonisation and the length of road trains, without coming to agreement on either topic.

Under "other business", my hon. Friend raised the issue of airport slot allocations and stressed the Government's concern that the Commission's proposed block exemption regulation was premature in creating new policy in this area in view of the fact that in the near future the Council was due to consider another Commission proposal on common rules for slot allocations. Other issues also briefly discussed included the aviation negotiations with Norway and Sweden and the nationality clause in air services agreements.

London Underground

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has any plans to reassess the feasibility of extending the London underground to Thamesmead; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: London Transport and the London Docklands development corporation intend to mount a further study of the case for extending the rail network through the royal docks to Woolwich Arsenal and Thamesmead. The option of extending the Jubilee line through the royal docks is being safeguarded by the provision of a step-plate junction for which powers are being sought in the Bill now before Parliament.

Network SouthEast

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the Networker rolling stock to be introduced on Kent Link services operated by Network SouthEast.

Mr. Freeman: I understand that the first class 465 Networker is due to be delivered to Kent Link in September 1991.

Rail Track Pollution

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what measures he plans to take to reduce the risks of infection identified in the British Transport Commission report on track pollution problems, and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: Recent advice from the Health and Safety Executive's employment medical advisory service confirms that the risk of infection by material on railway tracks discharged from train toilets is slight. The railway industry advisory committee of the Health and Safety Commission, which is chaired by the chief inspecting

officer of railways has discussed this matter and keeps it under review. The railway inspectorate is in touch with the British Railways Board to consider whether any further measures are appropriate. I also refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea (Mr. Bowis) on 12 November at column *62*.

Underground Escalators

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) whether he will take steps to enable managers of London Underground Ltd. to study how other urban transport systems facilitate access to the underground system by the disabled, elderly or those with young children when escalators are out of action; and whether he will make a statement;

(2) whether he has any information as to how long the escalators at Walthamstow underground station were out of action this year; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether he has any information as to why the escalators at Vauxhall underground station have been out of action for one year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: The operation of escalators on London's underground system is the responsibility of London Underground Limited. I suggest that the hon. Member contact LUL direct. I have forwarded the hon. Member's comments to the managing director of London Underground Ltd.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Southern Africa

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to increase aid to Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference for production and trade programmes.

Mrs. Chalker: We shall be considering the future level, and uses, of our support for the regional programmes of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference—SADCC—in advance of the annual consultative conference in early 1991. The pledge of £10 million, made in January this year, brings the total of our support for SADCC since its inception in 1980 to £70 million.

Mozambique

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to increase Britain's contribution to the United Nations Mozambique emergency appeal.

Mrs. Chalker: We pledged 10,000 tonnes of food and £3·5 million of non-food assistance in response to the United Nations emergency appeal in April and a further £3 million to UNHCR in June in support of Mozambican refugees. This brought the total of our emergency assistance to Mozambique since 1987 to more than £55 million, including our share of such aid from the European Community. We are in touch with the Mozambican authorities and with British voluntary agencies about allocation of funds pledged but not yet committed. We will continue to do what we can to assist.

Development Council

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Development Council on 5 November.

Mrs. Chalker: The Development Council addressed a range of important issues at its meeting on 5 November, including new proposals for assistance to Asia and Latin America, and to the Mediterranean. I stressed the importance of reforming the tropical forestry action plan, as described yesterday during my evidence to the Environment Select Committee of this House. I also expressed our grave concern at the situation in the Horn of Africa, and announced that Britain would give 10,000 tonnes of cereals and 400 tonnes of wheatflour worth approximately £2 million through CARE for the Sudan.

Burma

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the dates when decisions were made to allocate United Kingdom aid to support contracts won by British companies, to provide power generating plant to Burma.

Mrs. Chalker: Aid and trade provision grants have been allocated in support of two contracts won by John Brown Engineering in Burma, each to provide three gas turbine generator sets and ancillary equipment. The dates of the agreements with the Burmese Government were 3 April 1980 and 6 August 1982 respectively.

Military Training

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will list all occasions on which the costs of providing military training to developing countries has been met by the Overseas Development Administration since 1979; and what was the amount paid in each case;

(2) whether the Overseas Development Administration paid any amount towards the cost of providing free military training to the Filipino presidential security guard in March and April.

Mrs. Chalker: There are none. The overseas aid programme is not used in the Philippines or elsewhere to finance military training.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Religious Education

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the projects funded by his Department in the field of religious education over the past five years giving the organisation funded and the cost of each project.

Mr. Eggar: The Department funded a project by the Christian Education Movement from April 1988 to December 1989, when responsibility was transferred to the National Curriculum Council. The project is concerned with the teaching of personal and social values through religious education in secondary school years four and five. It is due to be completed in March 1991 at a total cost of £120,000.

Haberdashers' Aske's CTC

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science (1) what numbers of pupils he has agreed should be admitted into the first-year group at the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college in September 1991; and how many places will be available in the current year group for *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls;

(2) what is the total number of pupils he intends to fund at the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college when it becomes fully operational.

Mr. Eggar: The Haberdashers' Aske's CTC Trust has not yet submitted its admissions policy for my right hon. and learned Friend's agreement. Under the provisions of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, selection arrangements for the CTC may not pay regard to the sex of the applicants. It is, nevertheless, likely that numbers of boys and girls entering the CTC will be broadly balanced.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science which specific circumstances applying to the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college, different from those at maintained schools, made it appropriate to approve articles of association for the college under which parent governors will be barred from serving on its finance committee.

Mr. Eggar: The Secretary of State enters into agreement with private sponsors to establish and maintain city technology colleges, which are independent schools. It is therefore for the CTC trust to decide on the role of governors, including parent governors, providing that, in the Secretary of State's estimation, this does not conflict with the needs of the CTC.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how the sum provided in private sponsorship for the Haberdashers' Aske's city technology college is to be divided between *(a)* the value of the sites and premises of the proposed college and *(b)* other contributions to the capital costs of establishing the college; and what is the basis of his current valuation of the sites and premises.

Mr. Eggar: The Haberdashers' Company has agreed to make available a 99-year lease of the sites and premises of the Hatcham schools as its contribution towards initial capital costs of establishing the CTC. My right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State requested and received an assessment of their value for educational purposes from the district valuer. The Haberdashers' Company has also agreed to underwrite sponsorship of £1 million which may be contributed towards capital costs.

Newham School Leavers

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what percentage of Newham school leavers have no qualifications according to the most recent statistics.

Mr. Eggar: The latest available information is for 1989. Because the data came from a sample survey, figures for the smaller LEAs, like Newham, are given on a three-year aggregate to reduce sampling error.

Leavers from maintained schools in 1986-87, 1987-88, 1988-89

	All leavers (000s)	*Leavers awarded no graded result* percent
Newham	8·38	21·0
England	1,856·99	9·5

City Technology Colleges

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if pupils at city technology colleges will be subject to any charges in respect of their participation in enrichment activities.

Mr. Eggar: CTCs may charge for enrichment activities provided outside school hours, so long as these are not an essential part of the curriculum. In common with maintained schools, CTCs may not charge for provision offered during school hours, with the exception of individual music tuition. These conditions are set out in paragraphs 19 to 22 of the model CTC funding agreement, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Stratford School, London

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will give details of the educational grounds taken into account when deciding to approve grant-maintained status for Stratford school, London E7.

Mr. Eggar: In approving this application for grant-maintained status, my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State judged that, at its present size, Stratford school was able to provide cost effectively for pupils aged 11 to 18 and that it was capable of maintaining and improving its performance under new management.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Internal Market Council

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what happened at the Internal Market Council meeting in Brussels on 8 November.

Mr. Redwood: I represented the United Kingdom at the Internal Market Council on 8 November. Two measures were adopted to liberalise the EC insurance market: the life services directive and the motor services directive. Two company law measures were adopted, extending the provisions of the 4th and 7th company law directives to certain partnerships and creating exemptions for small and medium-sized companies.

The Council also heard a first report from Sir Leon Brittan on the operation of the EC merger regulation. It was agreed that annual progress reports should be made.

I asked that the Commission should treat merger inquiries as an objective process; that clear rules should be observed in hearing evidence and offering fair opportunities to all interested parties; that the Competition Commissioner should stress to his colleagues the need for their final decision to be based the evidence and findings of the investigation and the need to preserve the confidentiality of the price sensitive company information; and reminded the Council that article 2 states clearly that

competition is the sole criterion to be used in the examination. The Vice President was sympathetic to these points.

The Council discussed the copyright protection of computer software, and in particular the extent to which decompilation or reverse engineering should be permitted. The Council also discussed briefly progress reports on the fifth company law directive, the second diplomas directive, and the firearms directive.

Australia

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the present state of trade between the United Kingdom and Australia; and what efforts are being made to improve the position.

Mr. Sainsbury: Trade with Australia increased by over 24 per cent. last year, with United Kingdom exports totalling £1,711 million. Following the United Kingdom-Australia trade and investment conference in 1989, which was attended by the Prime Ministers of Australia and the United Kingdom, together with senior Ministers and business men from both countries, the DTI has put in place a programme of missions, fairs, seminars and other promotional events designed to promote British exports further and build on the success of the conference.

Health and Safety

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what response has been made to *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the Council in regards to Council document 8207/90 of 2 August 1990.

Mr. Forth *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* I have been asked to reply.

There has been no formal written response to the Commission. However, the United Kingdom abstained from voting at the Internal Market Council meeting in October at which the proposal was carried.

LORD PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Ministers' Pay

Mr. Richard Page: To ask the Lord President of the Council if he will make a statement about Ministers' pay.

Mr. MacGregor: The salaries of Ministers and other paid office holders were last increased from 1 January 1990 under the terms of the Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1989 and will remain at these levels until changed by a new order. The salaries of Members of Parliament will increase by 8·5 per cent. from 1 January 1991 according to the terms of the resolution of 21 July 1987. In the light of this, the Government propose that ministerial salaries should increase by 8·5 per cent. also. The details are set out in the table, and I have today laid the draft Ministerial and other Salaries Order 1990 to implement these changes.

Ministers' and other paid office holders' salaries

	Current official salary	*Proposed January 1991 official salary*	*Percentage increase*	*Current total salary (including reduced parliamentary salary of £20,101)*	*Total January 1991 salary (including reduced parliamentary salary of £21,809)*	*Total percentage increase*
	£	£	*Per cent.*	£	£	*Per cent.*
Prime Minister[1]	46,750	50,724	8·5	66,851	72,533	8·5
Cabinet Ministers (C)	35,120	38,105	8·5	55,221	59,914	8·5
Cabinet Ministers (L)	44,591	48,381	8·5	—	—	—
Ministers of State (C)	24,850	26,962	8·5	44,951	48,771	8·5
Ministers of State (L)	39,641	43,010	8·5	—	—	—
Parliamentary Secretaries (C)	18,860	20,463	8·5	38,961	42,272	8·5
Parliamentary Secretaries (L)	33,241	36,066	8·5	—	—	—
Attorney General	37,320	40,492	8·5	57,421	62,301	8·5
Solicitor General	30,600	33,201	8·5	50,701	55,010	8·5
Lord Advocate	44,661	48,457	8·5	—	—	—
Solicitor General for Scotland	39,109	42,433	8·5	—	—	—
House of Commons						
Mr. Speaker[1]	36,850	39,982	8·5	56,951	61,791	8·5
Leader of the Opposition	32,200	34,937	8·5	52,301	56,746	8·5
Chief Whip	29,230	31,715	8·5	49,331	53,524	8·5
Deputy Chief Whip	24,850	26,962	8·5	44,951	48,771	8·5
Opposition Chief Whip	24,850	26,962	8·5	44,951	48,771	8·5
Government Whips and Assistant Government Whips	15,990	17,349	8·5	36,091	39,158	8·5
Assistant Opposition Whip	15,990	17,349	8·5	36,091	39,158	8·5
Chairman of Ways and Means	24,850	26,962	8·5	44,951	48,771	8·5
Deputy Chairmen of Ways and Means	21,840	23,696	8·5	41,941	45,505	8·5
House of Lords						
Chief Whip	39,641	43,010	8·5	—	—	—
Deputy Chief Whip	33,241	36,066	8·5	—	—	—
Government Whips	29,971	32,519	8·5	—	—	—
Opposition Leader	33,241	36,066	8·5	—	—	—
Opposition Chief Whip	29,971	32,519	8·5	—	—	—
Chairman of Committees	39,641	43,010	8·5	—	—	—
Principal Deputy Chairman of Committees	36,131	39,202	8·5	—	—	—

	Current official salary	Proposed January 1991 official salary	Percentage increase	Current total salary (including reduced parliamentary salary of £20,101)	Total January 1991 salary (including reduced parliamentary salary of £21,809)	Total percentage increase
	£	£	Per cent.	£	£	Per cent.
Members of Parliament	26,701	28,970	8·5	—	—	—

[1]The Prime Minister and Mr. Speaker have elected to receive the same salary as a Cabinet Minister in the House of Commons.

Notes:

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster does not accept his Ministerial salary.

The Lord Chancellor's salary is governed by the Lord Chancellor's Salary Order 1989 and is not affected by this Order. (He receives £91,500 effective from 18 April 1989).

WALES

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether he has any guidelines for use by his Department concerning criteria of demand in relation to provision of Welsh language forms under the Welsh Language Act 1967; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Decisions on whether documents published by the Welsh Office should be available in Welsh or in a bilingual format are taken by reference to the Hughes Parry criteria of demand, expense, expediency and prestige. These criteria are currently being reviewed in the light of the guidelines prepared by the Welsh Language Board.

Roads

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether there have been any changes in time scale or estimated cost for improvement of the north-south road communications in Wales on the A470, A487 and A483 trunk roads since the publication of "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s"; and if he will make a statement.

Sir Wyn Roberts: Information on all road schemes listed in "Roads in Wales: Progress and Plans for the 1990s" is currently being updated, for inclusion in a supplement to "Roads in Wales" to be published in the new year.

International Adoption

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what official guidelines are issued to local authorities relating to international adoption procedures.

Mr. Grist: Guidance on adoption of children from overseas is contained in a letter of 2 October 1990 from the chief inspector, social services inspectorate, Wales, to directors of social services in Wales. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House.

Hospital Waiting Lists

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimates he has made of the size of waiting lists in Welsh hospitals *(a)* six months and *(b)* one year hence, and of the reasons for any increase or decrease over the preceding six months.

Mr. Grist: Information about the size of prospective waiting lists and the length of time people may have to wait will become available only following the submission of district health authorities' final procurement plans in March 1991.

The latest information on waiting lists is at 31 March 1990 and is contained in the "Welsh Hospital Waiting List Bulletin 1990: No. 2", a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

Hospital Bed Closures

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what will be the total loss of in-patient care days that will result from the anticipated closure of hospital beds in Wales in the year ending April 1991.

Mr. Grist: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Rod Richards

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what is his policy with regard to the appointment of ministerial advisers who may previously have been parliamentary candidates; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he will outline his reasons for seeking to appoint Mr. Rod Richards as his personal adviser;

(3) if he will list the specific topics on which Mr. Rod Richards will be employed to provide him with advice and Mr. Richards's qualifications and experience to each of those topics.

Mr. David Hunt: I have appointed Mr. Richards to advise me on a range of subjects drawing on his knowledge and experience in the public and private sectors. Special advisers are appointed on a personal basis. Mr. Richards is my only such adviser at present. He is appointed as a civil servant and his terms and conditions are, where appropriate, the same as for civil servants. It is not the practice to reveal the salaries of advisers nor, in consequence, the total cost of an individual appointment as these are individually negotiated in relation to previous outside earnings and are therefore confidential. Special advisers are appointed after consultation with the Prime Minister.

School (Llwyn Mawr)

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations have been received from *(a)* Sketty Ward councillors and *(b)* the Sketty Schools

Parents Association by his Department in the last three years, prior to his directive for the sale of the site, about the need for a school on the Llwyn Mawr site.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Department has no record of having received such representations.

NHS Operations

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the total number of patients in each of the Welsh area health authorities that have had national health service operations in the past three years *(a)* outside their own area health authority area and *(b)* in London hospitals.

Mr. Grist: The table shows, for each Welsh district health authority, the number of patient discharges and deaths having operations, including non-operative procedures, in NHS hospitals in Wales outside their own district health authority.

Information on Welsh residents having operations outside Wales, including London hospitals, is not collected centrally.

Patient discharges and deaths having operations in NHS hospitals in Wales outside their own district health authority[1,2]

District health authority of residence	*1986*	*1987*	*1988*
Clwyd	184	199	189
East Dyfed	4,708	4,926	4,850
Pembrokeshire	2,294	2,566	2,606
Gwent	2,810	2,720	2,752
Gwynedd	2,216	2,170	2,267
Mid Glamorgan	9,756	9,517	9,970
Powys	2,731	3,140	2,959
South Glamorgan	1,770	2,029	1,672
West Glamorgan	1,336	1,312	1,231

[1] The information may understate the true position in that not all hospitals provide complete clinical details relating to patient discharges and deaths.

[2] The information is based on cases where details of the patient's district of residence has been supplied.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Social Fund

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what percentages of income support claimants aged under 60 years are repaying social fund budgeting loans and/or crisis loans by deductions from their benefit payments in the Doncaster area offices; and what is the average repayment in terms of a proportion of their income.

Mr. Scott: The table shows the number of social fund loans being recovered from income support recipients aged under 60 at the end of August 1990 and the percentage of recipients in that age group that the figure represents.

	Number of recoveries August 1990	*Percentage of IS recipients under 60 repaying via benefit*
Doncaster East	1,149	16·3
Doncaster West	1,563	16·2
Wath on Dearne	1,110	18·6

Information about the average repayment in terms of a proportion of income is not available.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much the social fund budget will be in 1991-92 in *(a)* gross and *(b)* net terms; and what were the comparable figures for each year since the social fund's introduction.

Mr. Scott: We shall make an announcement about the 1991-92 budget nearer the time. Details of the previous years' budgets are in the table.

	Gross £ million	*Net £ million*
1988-89	203	125
1989-90	206	99
1990-91	227	100

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list by office in the London borough of Newham the number of social fund applications *(a)* submitted and *(b)* refused since 1 April.

Mr. Scott: Details of applications processed and awards made can be obtained from information placed in the Library.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many and what percentage of recipients and of households claiming income support are repaying social fund loans by deductions from their benefit payments.

Mr. Scott: I refer the hon. Member to the replies that I gave him on 24 October 1990 at column *226* and 1 November 1990 at column *671*. The information given in those replies relates to income support recipients who may or may not be householders. Separate information relating to households is not available.

Water Metering

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the introduction of water metering on families in receipt of income support; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The impact of water metering on families will vary according to a wide range of circumstances, including the rateable value of property which underpins the current system of water charges, and whether or not they pay sewerage charges. It has never been thought practicable or right to make specific provision for metered services such as gas and electricity within social security benefits.

Residential and Nursing Care

Mr. Spearing: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what steps he expects to take consequent on the shortfall shown between resources available for residential and nursing care and its costs for charitable and proprietorial homes as shown in the commissioned report of Price Waterhouse, summarised in the reply of 24 October 1990, *Official Report*, columns *228-29*.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on 24 October, *Official Report* columns *351-52*, the proposed increases to the income support limits for residential care and nursing homes from April 1991. These increases, which will cost

£225 million in a full year, were arrived at in the light of the Price Waterhouse survey together with other available evidence.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to upgrade severe disablement allowance to the level of invalidity benefit.

Mr. Scott: Yesterday, regulations were laid before the House, introducing age-related additions to severe disablement allowance with effect from 3 December 1990. We estimate that 245,000 people will have their severe disablement allowance increased at a net cost of £50 million in a full year. We have no current plans to increase the rate of the allowance to that of invalidity benefit.

Family Credit

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families were receiving family credit at the latest available date, breaking these figures down into *(a)* one-parent and two-parent families and *(b)* one-earner and two-earner families.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest available information relates to the end of August 1990 when the family credit caseload stood at 323,000. The breakdowns requested are as follows:

Families	*Number*
One-parent	126,000
Two-parent	197,000
One-earner	308,000
Two-earner	15,000

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many families receiving family credit are *(a)* tenants or *(b)* homeowners.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: This information is not available.

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children were in families receiving family credit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: At the end of August 1990, there were 684,000 children in such families.

HEALTH

Prescribing

Mr. Thornton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the policy of his Department as to the grounds on which hospitals and general practices should make decisions to use particular medicines on clinical grounds and as to the use of preferred treatment lists to promote rational prescribing rather than budget savings.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Both hospital clinicians and general practitioners are free to prescribe the drug which in their clinical judgment best suits the patient and the condition. The Department encourages clinicians to develop formularies of preferred treatments in order to promote rational and cost effective prescribing.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress is being made on the introduction of limited rights of prescribing for nurses.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We are to commission an independent analysis of the costs and benefits of implementing the proposals of the advisory group on nurse prescribing.

Higham Grange Hospital

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received concerning the changes to management circumstances at Higham Grange hospital in Leicestershire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: A number of representations concerning Higham Grange rehabilitation centre in Leicestershire has been received. The proposed venture at Higham Grange will enable a valuable service to continue in the area. It is a fine example of the private and public sector working together to provide a better health service for all.

Congenital Toxoplasmosis

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide a general screening of pregnant mothers to discover the risks of congenital toxoplasmosis.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In any screening programme, the benefits conferred by screening must clearly outweigh any risks. The Department recently sought the opinion of leading experts on the advantages and disadvantages of screening for toxoplasmosis in pregnancy. I am advised that such screening should not be introduced in the United Kingdom at present because the natural history of the disease, the accuracy of the tests and the efficiency of possible treatment are uncertain.

Neonatal Hearing Screening

Mrs. Rosie Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the level of availability on the national health service of neonatal hearing screening by use of the auditory brainstem evoked potential apparatus, to those women who may be at risk.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

NHS Agency Staff

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list by year for the last five years to date the annual cost of the national health service in the Doncaster district health authority for staff who have been employed through agencies as *(a)* nurses, *(b)* operating department assistants and *(c)* ancillary and other staff.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested is not held centrally, and is not easily obtainable. The hon. Member may wish to write to Mr. J. G. S. Smith, chairman of Doncaster health authority, for the information that he requires.

Dentists

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has on the number of dentists who have left the national health service in the past 12 months; and how many were in practice in the south-east.

Mr. Dorrell: Provisional data available show that 893 dentists ceased to provide general dental services in England during the year ended 30 September 1990; 1,084 dentists provided general dental services for the first time during that year, a net increase of 191. In the same period, the total number of dentists providing general dental services in the south-east (the four Thames regions and the Oxford region) reduced by 34 (0·6 per cent.).

International Adoption

Mr. Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the refusal by Hertfordshire county council to carry out a home assessment for couples wishing to adopt a Romanian child; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Hertfordshire county council has confirmed to the Department that it does carry out home study assessments for couples who wish to adopt a Romanian child; the social services department is engaging additional social workers to provide services in accordance with recent Department of Health guidance CI(90)17, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Cancer Mortality, Newham

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the increases registered in cancer mortality rates in the London borough of Newham since 1985.

Mr. Dorrell: The number of deaths from major forms of cancer to residents of the London borough of Newham have fluctuated over the years since 1985. The data does not show evidence of an overall upward trend in cancer mortality rates in the borough over these years.

Disabled People

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received concerning full implementation of the Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation and Representation) Act 1986.

Mr. Dorrell: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply that my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State gave the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) on 20 March 1990 at columns *563-65*. Since then, we have answered four parliamentary questions and six letters from hon. Members on this issue. The Association of Metropolitan Authorities, the Association of County Councils and representatives of Cleveland social services department have also, on separate occasions, indicated support for full implementation.

Halifax District General Hospital

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the reason for his decision to postpone the building of the new Halifax district general hospital for four years; and if he will now take steps to ensure the reopening of the wards closed to accommodate the new hospital and the re-building of the laundry.

Mr. Dorrell: Decisions on the relative priority of schemes within Yorkshire regional health authority's capital programme are for the regional health authority.

THE ARTS

Business Sponsorship

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Minister for the Arts how much expenditure has been incurred under the business sponsorship incentive scheme in Scotland in respect of 1989 and 1990 to the latest available figures.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* Arts organisations in Scotland have been highly successful in winning awards under my business sponsorship incentive scheme. In 1989-90, 38 awards totalling £288,003 were made to match £707,380 in new sponsorship. In the first half of this year alone there have been 53 awards amounting to £525,141 to match just over £1 million in new sponsorship money.

Mr. Allan Stewart: To ask the Minister for the Arts how much expenditure has been incurred under the business sponsorship incentive scheme in respect of projects under Glasgow's year as European City of Culture.

Mr. Mellor *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* I am delighted that under my business sponsorship incentive scheme, awards totalling £364,041 have been made to arts organisations in Glasgow to match £800,000 in new sponsorship money.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Mortgage Arrears, Newham

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he has of the number of people *(a)* up to three months, *(b)* up to six months and *(c)* over 12 months in arrears on their mortgage repayments in the London borough of Newham.

Mr. Maples: That information is not available.

Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether the Treasury has advised against the use of any company as an adviser on privatisation;

(2) if he will make it his policy to advise Departments not to use as advisers on privatisation, companies which have been criticised by Department of Trade and Industry inspectors.

Mr. Maude: It is for Departments to decide on the appointment of their advisers, following consultation as appropriate, in the light of all the relevant circumstances.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Treasury maintains a list of approved advisers on privatisation.

Mr. Maude: No. The Treasury does, however, maintain a list, which it makes available to departments, setting out the appointments which various advisers have held in past privatisations.

EC Gross Domestic Products

Mr. Biffen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the gross domestic products of the countries comprising the European Community, showing also the estimated respective size of the undeclared or black economies.

Mr. Major: Following is the information requested:

GDP at purchasing power parities 1989

	(United States dollars billions)
United Kingdom	818·4
Germany	941·7
France	820·0
Italy	798·6
Belgium	135·2
Denmark	73·8
Greece	73·2
Ireland	31·2
Luxembourg	6·3
Netherlands	205·1
Portugal	71·9
Spain	399·3

Source: OECD.

Some of these figures may include an allowance for activity in the undeclared, or black, economy, but no comprehensive statement is available on the size and extent of these allowances.

Civil Servants (Retirement Age)

Mr. Andrew Bowden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to enable some civil servants to remain in employment until the age of 70 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: My Department will shortly be implementing one of the recommendations of an interdepartmental working group set up to consider ways of alleviating the effect of the forecast demographic changes to the work force in the 1990s. The decision to raise the maximum age at which civil servants retire from 65 to 70 will give Departments greater flexibility in meeting their staffing needs through the employment of older workers. My Department has also recently removed the upper age limits on recruitment for all service wide grades.

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases there are in Wales where those registered for value-added tax either registered in Welsh or have subsequently requested for their value-added tax administration to be undertaken through the medium of the Welsh language.

Mr. Ryder: About 40 to 50 traders a year complete their applications for VAT registration in Welsh. Overall, approximately 470 traders are issued with VAT returns in Welsh by Customs and Excise.

Exchange Rates

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list, for a set point in each quarter, the value of the £ sterling against the deutschmark, from May 1979 to the present.

Mr. Maples: The exchange rate for sterling against the deutschmark published on an average monthly basis is to be found in the Central Statistical Office publication, "Financial Statistics". Current and back copies are available for reference in the Library of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Iran

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the United Kingdom representative at the United Nations will make concerning the recent visit by the United Nations special representative, Galindo Pohl, to Iran.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The UN special representative has yet to publish the report of his second visit. We shall study it carefully when it issues. In the meantime we remain in regular contact with the centre for human rights in Geneva, where he is based.

Palestine Liberation Organisation

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when he next plans to meet officials of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's London office to discuss the Gulf crisis and the question of occupied territories in Israel;

(2) what is his Department's current assessment of the position of the Palestine Liberation Organisation on the Gulf crisis;

(3) when he last met officials of the Palestine Liberation Organisation's London office; and what was discussed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has not himself held discussions with officials of the PLO's London office and has no plans to do so. Ministers are not at present meeting PLO representatives because of the PLO's equivocation over the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. This was a great mistake which has seriously damaged their cause.

But the PLO cannot be ignored and we remain in regular contact with it at official level on middle eastern issues.

Fiji

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when next he will be meeting the the Ambassador of Fiji; and what will be discussed.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no plans to meet the Ambassador of Fiji.

Ethnic and Linguistic Communities

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made within the European Community to ensure cultural protection for the older and long-established ethnic and linguistic communities living within national boundaries.

Mr. Garel-Jones: The Community has a small budget (1·1 mecu in 1990) for educational measures for minority languages and cultures. Additionally, the Commission has launched a pilot scheme to provide financial aid for translations of contemporary literary works. Priority is being given to works in minority languages.

Anirudh Singh

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received concerning the arrest and detention of Anirudh Singh, of Leicester, in Fiji; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have received no other representations apart from a letter from the hon. Member.

We were disturbed to hear of the abduction and beating of Dr. Singh. We are pleased he has been released and that those thought to be responsible for his abduction are being prosecuted.

Middle East Oil

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information his Department has on the number of oil refineries in the middle east; and how much oil they contain.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: Refineries in each of the middle eastern countries are listed in the table below, with their total refining capacity in barrels per calendar day. No information is available on storage capacity or on levels of stocks at refineries.

Country	*Refinery*	*Capacity*
Abu Dhabi, UAE	Ruwais	163,000
2 refineries	Ajman	174,000
	Total	337,000
Bahrain	Bahrain	350,000
1 refinery		
Iran	Abadan	155,000
6 refineries	Tabriz	120,000
	Shiraz	56,000
	Tehran	325,000
	Isfahan	335,000
	Bakhtran	18,000
	Total	1,009,000
Iraq	Basrah	87,650
8 refineries	Daurah	70,000
	Al Haditha	7,000
	Kirkuk	30,000
	Mufthiah	4,500
	Baiull	215,000
	Qaiyera	2,000
	Khanaquin	12,000
	Total	418,000
Kuwait	Shuaiba	314,000
3 refineries	Mina-Al-Ahmad	372,000
	Mina Abdulla	317,000
	Total	1,003,000
Oman	Mina-Al-Fahal	80,000
1 refinery		
Qatar	UMM Said	62,000
1 refinery		
Saudi Arabia	Ras Tanura	643,000
7 refineries	Jeddah (1)	107,600
	Riyadh	120,000
	Yanbu (1)	170,000
	Yanbu (2)	406,500
	Al Jubail	362,000
	Jeddah (2)	21,700
	Total	1,829,800
Neutral Zone (Kuwait, Saudi)	Ras-Al-Khafji	30,000
1 refinery		
Egypt	Mex-Alexandria	126,615
6 refineries	Amaria-Alexandria	78,440
	Suez (1)	91,520
	Suez (2)	83,790
	Musturud	134,140
	Tanta	22,020
	Total	536,525
Israel	Haifa	200,000
2 refineries	Ashdod	115,000
	Total	315,000
Jordan	Zerka	113,500
1 refinery		
Lebanon	Tripoli	30,000
2 refineries	Sidon	17,000
	Total	47,000
Syria	Banias	120,600
2 refineries	Homs	102,440
	Total	223,040
Yemen (South)	Aden	178,000
1 refinery		

The Gulf

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions are being held with the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on their proposals for a diplomatic solution to the Gulf crisis.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are in close touch with the Soviet Union on all aspects of the Gulf crises, based on our shared commitment to the full implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any further trips are planned to Iraq in an effort to secure the release of British hostages.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The declaration issued by the European Council in Rome on 28 October made clear the determination of the Twelve not to send representatives to Baghdad to negotiate with Saddam Hussein over the release of foreign hostages in Iraq and Kuwait. The United Nations Security Council is engaged in this matter and the Twelve have agreed to encourage the United Nations Secretary-General to send a personal representative to Iraq to achieve the immediate departure of all hostages.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions are being held with the French Government on their proposals for a diplomatic solution to the Gulf crisis.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We are in close touch with the French Government on all aspects of the Gulf crisis. The basis of our discussions, including those on 27 October

between my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Mitterrand, is our shared commitment to the full implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Corbyn To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with France about the methods that it used to achieve the release of French nationals in Kuwait and Iraq.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The French Government have affirmed that the release of the French hostages took placed entirely at Iraqi initiative. The delaration issued by the European Council in Rome on 28 October made clear the determination of the Twelve not to send representatives to Baghdad to negotiate with the Iraqis over the release of foreign hostages in Iraq and Kuwait.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when the hon. Member for Linlithgow may expect a substantive answer to his letter to the Foreign Secretary relating to a document supposedly found in Kuwait by Iraqi troops concerning the destabilisation of Iraq by fluctuations in oil prices, and subsequent translation from Arabic to English by the Office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The hon. Member wrote to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs about this on 9 November. My right hon. Friend replied on 13 November.

Temple Mount Killings

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made by the British Government to the Government of Israel about their refusal to admit a United Nations investigation into the killing of Palestinians at Temple Mount.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs urged members of the Israeli Government to reconsider their decision not to receive the United Nations Secretary-General's mission during his talks with them on 16 and 17 October. We voted for SCR 673 regretting Israel's failure to respond positively.

UN Military Staff Committee

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there are any plans permanently to revitalise the United Nations military staff committee; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: The Military Staff Committee has met formally and briefly at United Nations headquarters approximately twice a month since 1945. Separately there have been five ad hoc meetings of members of the military staff committee since the Gulf crisis began. These have proved a useful forum for the exchange of information.

Sri Lanka

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Sri Lankan Government concerning the abuse of human rights of the Tamil population.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have regularly raised our concerns about human rights issues with the Sri Lankan Government, both in London and Colombo. Both bilaterally and with our European partners we have urged the Sri Lankan Government to observe their international obligations in this field and have made clear that future decisions on development aid will be affected by the Government's performance on human rights.

Filipino Security Guard

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information he has concerning human rights abuses and executions carried out by the presidential security guard in the Philippines.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no recent information about abuses of human rights or of executions alleged to have been carried out by the presidential security guard in the Philippines.

Albania

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent talks with Albania on establishing diplomatic relations.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: Officials from the Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office held talks in Rome on 5 and 6 November. The talks were conducted in a positive atmosphere and covered bilateral issues, including the possible restoration of diplomatic relations.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Household Food

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the amount of consumer expenditure on household food in 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1989 in percentage terms in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, the United States of America and Japan.

Mr. Curry: The available information is shown in the table.

Household expenditure on food as a percentage of total consumer expenditure

	1960	*1970*	*1980*	*1988*
United Kingdom	25·0	20·0	16·9	12·2
West Germany[1]	33·4	27·3	22·0	20·0
France	[2]	22·5	18·0	16·6
United States of America	17·8	15·2	12·8	10·8
Japan[3]	[2]	30·0	24·4	20·2

[1] Includes alcoholic beverages.
[2] Figure not available.
[3] Includes alcoholic beverages and tobacco.
Sources: National Accounts for OECD countries, OECD United Kingdom National Accounts, CSO.

Mr. Ralph Howell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the amount of consumer expenditure on household food in 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1989, in actual and percentage terms and at 1989 prices.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is shown in the table.

Consumers' expenditure on household food in the United Kingdom

	Household expenditure on food at current prices (£ million)	*Expenditure on food as a percentage of total (per cent.)*	*Household expenditure on food in real terms*[1] *(Index 1989 = 100)*
1960	4,228	25·0	99·5
1970	6,369	20·0	101·2
1980	23,655	16·9	104·1
1989	39,181	11·9	100·0

[1] United Kingdom household expenditure on food at current prices deflated by the retail price index (all items) and expressed as an index (1989 = 100).

Source: United Kingdom National Accounts, CSO.

Fish Processing and Marketing

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's press release on the autumn statement explaining how ports may now take advantage of the extra funding to improve the processing and marketing of fish.

Mr. Curry: On 5 November the agriculture departments in the United Kingdom issued a joint press notice inviting applications for grant aid for projects related to the marketing and processing of fishery products. That notice gave a contact point for potential applicants wishing to learn more about the details of the scheme.

Less-favoured Areas

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the parishes and the counties in which they are located which have just been designated as less-favoured areas.

Mr. Gummer: The extension to our less-favoured area has cleared an important hurdle. That is acceptance by the committee on agricultural structures and rural development, but it has not yet been formally designated by the EC Commission. As soon as this designation has been notified to my Department I will inform the House.

Subsidy Reforms

Mr. Teddy Taylor: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the subsidy reforms agreed by the Council of Agriculture Ministers; and if he will explain what procedures are to be followed to repay to farmers any losses which they might sustain in consequence of the proposed reduction of subsidy support.

Mr. Curry: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) on 8 November at column 8. The European Commission will in due course make proposals for Community measures to accompany any agreement reached in the current GATT negotiations to reduce levels of agricultural support worldwide. The Council of Ministers will discuss the Commission's proposals under its normal procedures.

Fish Quotas

Mr. Morley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food following the wrongful declarations of fish taken from area VII, what steps he is taking to redistribute fish to ensure the non-sector quota for this area is not disadvantaged.

Mr. Curry: Following a full assessment of the up-to-date catch position, and the agreement of some producer organisations to release some of their allocations to the non-sector, we have now been able to reopen the non-sector Irish sea cod fishery.

It would only be possible to redistribute fish along the lines suggested by the hon. Member where fishermen had been successfully prosecuted for misdeclaration. In order to provide the non-sector with some protection against misdeclaration in the future, Fisheries Departments have consulted the industry on a proposal to require producer organisations which opt to manage a sectoral allocation for a species in one main sea area to take sectoral allocations for that species in all areas in the same year.

In addition, fisheries departments have consulted the industry on a proposal to omit 1990 from the reference period for the calculation of vessels' track records in respect of those area VII stocks for which the pattern of fishing in 1990 appears to be atypical of previous years. This would ensure that for any stock in area VII where misdeclaration had caused the pattern of fishing to change significantly in 1990, those who had misdeclared would not benefit by building up track records in these fisheries. Departments are considering the industry's response, with particular emphasis on the question of which stocks had unusual fishing patterns in 1990.

East Anglia

Mr. David Porter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his Department's press release on the autumn statement, explaining how *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* the National Rivers Authority will be able to draw on the extra funding additionally to protect the East Anglian coastline in its entirety.

Mr. Curry: An additional £7·1 million of grant and £9·9 million of supplementary credit approval are being made available over the next three years for coast protection work undertaken by maritime district councils. This means that support is now available for a programme of local authority coast protection work to nearly £88 million over this period. Funding is allocated to local authorities when schemes have been approved by the Department, and is provided according to need and priority.

For the National Rivers Authority, an extra £14·5 million of grant is being made available over the next three years for flood and sea defence work, which means that support will be available for an NRA programme over this period of nearly £245 million. The Anglian region of the NRA will benefit from funding within this total on a programme of about £95 million.

DEFENCE

The Gulf

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his estimate of the current daily cost of the deployment of United Kingdom forces in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The current estimate of the full daily operating cost of our forces in the Gulf is £2 million.

Alvis Stormer Vehclees

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when delivery will be taken of the first Alvis Stormer vehicles.

Mr. Alan Clark: It is planned that the Department will take delivery of the first Alvis Stormer vehicles by January 1991.

NATO Defence Market

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards the recommendation of the conference of national armaments directors that there should be an open defence market among the NATO countries; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: The NATO conference of national armaments directors is considering ways in which the conditions for defence trade within the NATO nations can be improved. A group has been established to consider this issue and to make recommendations. This initiative is welcome and I hope that the report will give support for practical moves towards an open defence market within NATO as a whole.

Panavia and Euro Fighter

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy towards a merger of the consortia Panavia and Euro Fighter; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Clark: This is a matter for the companies involved.

Filipino Security Guard

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether reported abuses of human rights and executions by the Filipino presidential security guard were taken into account in Her Majesty's Government's decision to provide military training to the guard in March and April.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: In deciding whether or not to provide military training to overseas countries, Her Majesty's Government take all relevant factors into account, including the treatment of human rights in the country concerned.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether military training provided by the British Government to the Filipino presidential security guard in March and April of the current year included any consideration of, or training in, respect for human rights.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to disclose the content of military training provided by Her Majesty's Government to other countries as such details are generally confidential between the Governments involved.

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the cost to Britain of providing military training to the Filipino presidential security guard in March and April; and from which budget this was paid.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The cost of providing military training to the Government of the Philippines was met from the United Kingdom military training assistance scheme which is part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's budget. It is not our practice to disclose the costs of training for individual countries.

RAF Bases, Germany

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of Royal Air Force bases in Germany.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Following my right hon. Friend's statement to the House on 25 July on "Options for Change", we have reviewed RAF basing requirements in Germany in the light of our commitments to NATO and of local, economic and environmental factors. After consultations with our allies, and in particular the German Government, we have decided to redeploy units from RAF Wildenrath during 1991-92 and from RAF Gutersloh subsequently. Flying activity will reduce progressively from 1991. We are now considering, in consultation with the German authorities, the future of these bases after RAF operations cease.

Trident

Mr. Lee: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to place the order for the third Vanguard class Trident missile submarine.

Mr. Alan Clark: I am pleased to be able to announce that an order has been placed today with Vickers Shipbuilding and Engineering Ltd. at Barrow-in-Furness for the construction of the Royal Navy's third Vanguard class Trident missile submarine. Negotiations have resulted in a keenly priced contract, and at a price lower on a comparable basis than those for the first two submarines. This reflects the improvements in productivity at VSEL and the considerable experience the company now has in building this class of submarine.

The order demonstrates the Government's commitment to the United Kingdom programme, and to the effective maintenance of Britain's strategic nuclear deterrent, while obtaining value for money for the taxpayer. Trident remains firmly on course for introduction into service in the mid-1990s.

Labour Statistics

6. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will give the latest unemployment levels in Liverpool; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: In September 1990, the unadjusted level of unemployment in the Liverpool travel-to-work area was 62,324, a fall of 35 per cent. since the June 1987 election. The comparison is affected by the change in benefit regulations for under 18-year-olds in September 1988 as well as seasonal influences.

16. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will provide the latest figures for unemployment; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: In September 1990 seasonally adjusted unemployment in the United Kingdom was 1,666,700 or 5·8 per cent. of the work force. The United Kingdom has one of the very lowest rates of unemployment in the European Community.

19. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list the member states of the European Community with a higher rate of unemployment than the United Kingdom.

Mr. Howard: Using the latest available internationally comparable figures, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and Spain all have a higher rate of unemployment than the United Kingdom.

20. **Mr. Jacques Arnold:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what were the statistics for unemployment in Gravesham in June 1987 and in the most recent month for which statistics are available.

Mr. Jackson: In June 1987 the numbers of unemployed claimants, not seasonally adjusted, in the Gravesham parliamentary constituency were 4,159. This compares with 2,262 in September 1990, a fall of 84 per cent.

The comparison is affected by the change in benefit regulations for under 18-year-olds in September 1988 as well as seasonal influences.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will publish a table showing the unemployment rate by ethnic origin and age in inner and outer London in 1970, 1980 and the latest date available.

Mr. Jackson *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* The estimates below compare the unemployment rates amongst ethnic minority groups in Greater London in spring 1989 with those in spring 1984. The 1989 labour force survey (LFS) is the latest for which information is available and the earliest comparable data is from the 1984 LFS.

Unemployment rates by ethnic origin in Greater London
Aged 16 and over

Per cent.

	1984	*1989*
All persons	9·9	6·7
White	8·7	5·8
Non-white	17·5	11·9
—West Indian/Guyanese	20·0	13·5
—Indian	11·5	8·9
—Pakistani/Bangladeshi	28·1	27·3
—Other ethnic origins	19·3	9·1

Source: Labour Force Survey.

The LFS is a sample survey of approximately 60,000 households in Great Britain conducted in the spring of each year. Because of this small sample size, the LFS does not provide reliable detailed estimates for small proportion groups within regions.

Enterprise Agencies

13. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many local enterprise agencies are currently operating; and if he will make a statement on their progress to date.

Mr. Forth: We know of 419 local enterprise agencies operating in the United Kingdom. Of these, 406 are approved by my Department under the statutory provisions which allow for tax relief on donations to them.

Many local enterprise agencies have now developed close working relationships with training and enterprise councils, bringing positive benefits to themselves, the TECs and to local small businesses.

24. **Mr. Harry Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many enterprise agencies have been established since 1979; how many were established in the period 1974 to 1979; how many jobs are estimated to have been generated in each case; at what cost to public funds; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Forth: The first enterprise agencies were established in 1978. At present we know of 324 operating in England.

Information on the number of jobs estimated to have been created by these agencies is not collected centrally by my Department.

Since April 1986, Government funding of local enterprise agencies in England has been primarily through my Department's local enterprise agency grant and project schemes. To date, more than £10 million has been paid to more than 200 agencies through these schemes.

Disabled People

14. **Mr. Thurnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received on the launch of the new logo and code of practice for the employment of disabled people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Howard: There has been a positive and encouraging response from a large number of employers and voluntary organisations to this initiative. The new symbol which we have introduced will play an important part in encouraging employers to adopt good policies and practices in employing people with disabilities, and will enable them to communicate their commitment to existing and potential employees.

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make it his policy to introduce full anti-discrimination legislation for disabled people.

Mr. Jackson: The consultative document "Employment and Training for People with Disabilities", which was published on 29 June, sets out various options for encouraging the employment of people with disabilities. What action to take will be considered in the light of the comments we receive.

Low Pay

15. **Mrs. Mahon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what plans he has to tackle the problem of low pay in Halifax and West Yorkshire.

Mr. Forth: Pay in Halifax and West Yorkshire, as elsewhere, is a matter for negotiators themselves to determine in the light of their particular financial, business and labour market circumstances.

Training

17. **Mr. Hind:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he has any plans to review the remuneration of training agents and providers on YTS and employment training; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: The remuneration of training agents and providers on youth training and employment training is for local negotiation.

26. **Mrs. Currie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proportion of young people under 18 years without a job can now be offered a suitable training place.

Mr. Howard: The Government guarantee the offer of a suitable training place to all young people under 18 who are not in full-time education or a job.

27. **Mr. Stern:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how many approved training places are taken up by women returnees to work in the latest available 12 months.

Mr. Howard: It is estimated that about 3 per cent. of all entrants to employment training are women returners.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) whether results from the 100 per cent. follow-up survey of employment training leavers have been made available to operational training and enterprise councils and Training Agency regional officers; and if similar information will be made available to hon. Members;

(2) whether he is yet in a position to publish the results of the employment training leavers' survey; and if he will make a statement;

(3) whether he will place the results from the Training Agency's 100 per cent. follow-up survey of employment training leavers in the Library; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Results of the follow-up survey of employment training leavers have been provided on Training Agency regional offices and operational training and enterprise councils. Summaries of survey results are available for hon. Members and are also contained in the November Labour Market Quarterly Report which is published this week. The report will be available in the Library from 14 November.

Rural Employment

21. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the Government's policy concerning alternative employment opportunities in rural areas.

Mr. Forth: We wish to encourage the development of alternative employment opportunities for rural communities. The flexible and locally focussed approach of the training and enterprise councils and, in Scotland, local enterprise companies, will be particularly helpful in responding to the needs of rural areas.

As we made clear in the Environment White Paper, the Government will also continue to work through agencies such as the Rural Development Commission to promote enterprise and economic diversity in a lively and prosperous countryside.

Parents

22. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what measures he is taking to assist the return of parents with dependants to the labour market.

Mr. Jackson: My colleagues and I take every opportunity to impress upon employers the need to adopt working practices which make it easier for employees to combine work and family responsibilities. This means more flexibility in hours of work and in holidays, job-sharing, career breaks, part-time working and, where appropriate, help with child care costs. In this time of demographic change, it will be the employers who develop family-friendly policies and practices who will be best placed to attract and retain scarce resources.

Further Education

23. **Sir Hal Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what proposals he has to increase the effectiveness of the work-related further education programme.

Mr. Howard: From April 1991 responsibility for payment for work-related further education monies formerly handled by the Training Agency will be transferred to the training and enterprise councils.

I believe that the training and enterprise councils will use this new responsibility to foster a more flexible further education service which is responsive to the needs of employers and individuals.

Wages Councils

25. **Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment how his Department intends to improve the work of the wages councils.

Mr. Forth: The councils are empowered to set minimum rates of pay in certain industries. Checks by wages inspectors show that compliance with wages council orders is running at a very high level.

EC Employment

28. **Mr. Colvin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is his estimate of the number of British citizens who will seek work in other European Community countries following the implementation of the Single European Act.

Mr. Forth: My Department has not estimated the number of United Kingdom citizens who will seek work in other EC countries following the Single European Act. However, the Act will remove barriers facing individuals who wish to work in other countries, and will also create many new jobs. We would therefore expect that movement both into and out of the United Kingdom, particularly by highly skilled workers, will increase after 1992.

Training and Enterprise Councils

29. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what is the value of the present level of training and enterprise support given by his Department to companies in Lancashire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: My Department is contributing some £39 million towards training and enterprise activities in Lancashire in 1990-91.

Training and enterprise councils (TECs) are currently being established to play a major role at local level in stimulating the high skill, high productivity economy we need and to take over responsibility for training and enterprise activities in their locality. The TEC covering East Lancashire (ELTEC) has been operational since April 1990 and the TEC covering West Lancashire (LAWTEC) is due to become operational in April 1991.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will make available the list of board members from any additional training and enterprise councils which have signed operational contracts.

Mr. Jackson: Fourty one TECs are now fully operational. I have arranged for an updated list of board members covering these TECs to be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Beaumont-Dark: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what are the implications of the Chancellor's autumn statement for the Government's policies on training and enterprise.

Mr. Howard: I recently published "1990s: the Skills Decade" which sets out strategic guidance for all involved in promoting the acquisition of skills and the development of enterprise in this country. The Chancellor's autumn statement provides the framework for this strategic guidance to be put into effect.

My strategic guidance places particular emphasis on the major role that training and enterprise councils (TECs) have in stimulating the high skill, high productivity economy we need. I have been greatly encouraged by the response we have had from the country's top business leaders in joining and leading the TECs and at their request I am making a number of changes to funding arrangements for 1991-92 to allow TECs much greater discretion in tailoring programmes to meet local needs.

First, more payments to TECs will depend on helping people to get jobs and qualifications through training rather than simply the time that they spend on programmes. At least 25 per cent. of TECs' funding for youth training (YT) and employment training (ET) will be dependent on results in terms of jobs and qualifications that are achieved. This will mean that many of the remaining rules for YT and ET will be removed. For example there will no longer be any limit on the maximum duration of training on ET. But priority will still be given to those in the guarantee and aim groups.

Secondly, the budgets for business and enterprise training and for the enterprise allowance scheme (EAS) which were previously separate will be merged to become one budget and TECs will be free to decide their relative priorities, subject to ensuring that a reasonable level of provision for EAS is maintained and guarantees to unemployed people are met. TECs will also have considerable discretion over the way they organise and fund EAS in their local areas and how participation might be linked to related training or business assistance.

Thirdly, TECs are being given a major new responsibility in work-related further education (WRFE). They will assume responsibility from 1 April for the WRFE budget that is currently managed by the Employment Department, amounting to over £105 millions. These funds will still be spent within the local education authority further education system. This will complement TECs' existing role in youth training and help ensure that college provision is more responsive to employment needs at local level.

I also plan to give TECs a wider role in education in other ways. TECs are being given a powerful voice in the continued development of the technical and vocational education initiative (TVEI) at local level and local education authorities will be required to consult TECs when they draw up their plans.

TECs will also be able to bid, as part of their business plans for 1991-92, for additional resources to launch or extend education business partnerships.

Finally, Her Majesty's senior chief inspector of schools has agreed that where HMI inspections largely or wholly focus on TEC-funded provision, HMI will jointly report back their findings to the relevant TEC and local education authority.

This represents a significant widening of responsibilities and increase in discretion for TECs. I am confident that these changes will greatly increase TECs, ability to respond quickly and effectively to local needs in their area and to ensure that education and training meet employers' needs. Overall, the public expenditure settlement ensures that my Department has the resources it needs, and the means to deploy them effectively, so as to improve the skills of the workforce, help small businesses and enterprise and get unemployed people back to work.

SCOTLAND

Primary Schools (Testing)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the responses he has received to the proposal to introduce tests at primary four and primary seven in Scottish schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The proposal to introduce primary testing was included in the consultation document "Curriculum and Assessment: A Policy for the 90s" issued in November 1987. Over 1,000 responses were received, most of which commented on the testing proposals. The decision to proceed with tests was announced on 3 October 1988 and all the responses were made available for public inspection during October and November of that year.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list by street and number of properties where Scottish Homes is the landlord within Govan constituency; and if he will show for each of the past 10 years the capital expenditure by Scottish Homes and its predecessor;

(2) if he will list the projects within Glasgow where Scottish Homes is now involved by itself, with Glasgow district council or other bodies, showing the Scottish Homes financial input and the district council or other bodies' contribution; and if he will show the starting date of each project.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Such information is not held by the Scottish Development Department. The hon. Member may wish to write directly to Scottish Homes, which may be able to provide the information that he has requested.

Geese

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the number of licences issued under section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to permit the killing of *(a)* barnacle and *(b)* Greenland white-fronted geese on Islay to prevent serious agricultural damage, for each winter since 1985-86.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Year	*Number of barnacle licences issued*	*Number of white-front licences issued*
1985-86	26	—
1986-87	29	—
1987-88	40	13
1988-89	30	2
1989-90	28	8

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will state the number of *(a)* barnacle and *(b)* Greenland white-fronted geese killed under licence on Islay to prevent serious agricultural damage in each winter since 1985-86.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The information is as follows:

Year	*Barnacles reported shot*	*White-fronts reported shot*
1985-86	541	—
1986-87	791	—
1987-88	505	76
1988-89	752	6
1989-90	915	45

Over the same period, the estimated numbers of both species over-wintering on Islay have increased substantially.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he is taking to ensure that Her Majesty's Government comply with the requirements of article 7.4 of the European Community directive on the conservation of wild birds 79/409 in respect of licences issued to permit the killing of migratory geese that would otherwise enjoy full protection, or be protected during the close season, under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Mr Michael Forsyth: Licences are issued under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 only after it has been established on the basis of a careful assessment of the situation on the ground that geese are causing sufficiently serious damage to crops or grassland to justify this step, and that there is no other satisfactory means of preventing such damage.

Conditions to guard against misuse are attached to the licences. Arrangements are made for the licences to be revoked in time to give the migratory geese a suitable period of preparation without disturbance before returning to their breeding grounds.

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many returns in respect of licences issued in winter 1989-90 to permit the killing of *(a)* barnacle and *(b)* Greenland white-fronted geese on Islay to prevent serious agricultural damage were incomplete; and whether he will withhold the giving of a new licence to those who failed to provide a comprehensive return in winter 1989-90.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Returns for 1989-90, including supplementary information provided at the request of the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland, are generally satisfactory. Wilful refusal to provide information required would be an important factor in consideration of any fresh application from the individual concerned.

Mrs. Margaret Smith

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will order a public inquiry into the death from Legionnaire's disease of Mrs. Margaret Smith, Westfield, Cumbernauld, while a patient at Glasgow royal infirmary; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I called for a full report on 10 October 1990 from Greater Glasgow health board on the recent incidences of Legionnaire's disease at Glasgow Royal Infirmary. A report was received on 12 November 1990 and is now being considered.

M80

Mr. Norman Hogg: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the line of route for the proposed M80 motorway between Stells and Haggs; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The feasibility study was received from the Scottish Development Department's consulting engineers in October 1990 which was several months later than had earlier been anticipated. It is now the subject of ongoing discussions with regional and district councils and other affected parties and it is expected that a decision will be made on the preferred route soon. Following this, draft orders will be published early next year with a public exhibition being held at that time to explain the proposals in detail.

Wildlife Conservation

Mr. Morley: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he will introduce appropriate measures to prevent licences which are issued under section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 from being misused by sporting interests.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Appropriate conditions to guard against misuse are already attached to licences issued under section 16 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. In addition licence holders are issued with notes of guidance which make clear to them the actions which are permitted and those which would constitute abuse of the licence.

Fishing Industry

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) how many tonnes of cod from area VIIa were landed by United Kingdom vessels in Scotland in the month of June for each of the years 1986 to 1990; and if he will make a statement on the figures for June 1990;

(2) how many tonnes of cod from areas VII (ex VIIa) and VIII EC were landed by United Kingdom vessels in Scotland in the month of June for each of the years 1986 to 1990; and if he will make a statement on the figures for June 1990;

(3) how many tonnes of haddock from areas VII and VIII EC were landed by United Kingdom vessels in Scotland in the month of June for each of the years 1986 to 1990; and if he will make a statement on the figures for June 1990;

(4) how many tonnes of saithe from areas VII and VIII EC were landed by United Kingdom vessels in Scotland in the month of June for each of the years 1986 to 1990; and if he will make a statement on the figures for June 1990.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: The table sets out the details requested:

	Cod VIIa	*Cod VII (excluding VIIa) and VIII EC*	*Haddock VII and VIII EC*	*Saithe VII and VIII EC*
1986	16	6	7	2
1987	26	—	1	2
1988	51	—	2	19
1989	42	—	1	9
1990	809	175	137	420

Hydro-electric Power

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what capacity of hydro-electric power is installed at present in Scotland; and what are his plans to encourage further generation by this means.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* I understand that the total existing conventional hydro-electric installed capacity in Scotland is at present, 1,270 megawatts, of which Scottish Hydro-Electric owns and operates 1,064 megawatts and ScottishPower 121 megawatts, the balance being owned and operated independently. These figures do not include the pumped storage stations at Foyers and Cruachan.

Hydro-electric power already supplies around 15 per cent. of electricity consumed in Scotland and, given the surplus generating capacity existing on the system, my right hon. and learned Friend has no specific plans at present to encourage further generation by hydro-electric power. However, the electricity companies keep their generation needs under constant review and I would expect them to continue to consider the respective merits of all sources of electricity generation and supply, including from possible hydro developments, in assessing the most efficient and economical means of meeting the needs of customers in the future.

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what range of prices is being offered to private hydro-electricity generators in Scotland.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* The level of payments by the public electricity suppliers in Scotland to private hydro-electricity generators is a matter for the companies.

Lothian Nurses

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on his response to representations from Lothian health board on the proposed strike of night nurses at Barrymour hospital, West Lothian and St. John's hospital, Livingston.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* I have received no representations from Lothian health board about a strike. While Ministers have no locus in determining nurse duty rotas, I understand that the Health Board is currently consulting members of staff to determine how they will be affected by the proposals and discussing possible solutions. Where nurses' hours are reduced, they will continue to be paid at their present salary for up to one year depending on length of service. During that time the board hopes that nurses who wish to increase their hours to present levels will be able to do so. I can see no reason why strike action should be considered in those circumstances.

Royal British Legion (Rating)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* any Scottish rating authorities that have granted rating relief to Royal British Legion premises under section 4 of the Local Government (Financial Provisions etc.) (Scotland) Act 1962.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* Information on organisations granted reduction or remission of rates by local authorities under section 4 of the Local Government (Financial Provisions etc) (Scotland) Act 1962 is not held centrally.

Child Care Inquiries

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list any inquiries other than that into Fife established under section 99 of the Children Act 1975.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* A section 99 inquiry was carried out in 1982 into the proposal by Orkney islands council to dismiss the reporter to the children's panel.

Local Enterprise Companies

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the board members, companies and organisations represented on each of the local enterprise companies.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) on 1 November.

Nursery Education

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many of the extra nursery school places since 1979 have been provided through the urban programme; and what percentage the urban programme places are of the increase in places since 1979.

Mr. Lang *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* A statistical record of nursery school places provided under the urban programme is not maintained separately and the information could be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Child Care, Fife

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what consideration was given to the publication of an interim report of the inquiry into child care policy in Fife; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: It is entirely for Sheriff Kearney, as chairman of the inquiry, to decide on the form of reporting.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give an estimate of the cost of the inquiry into child care policy in Fife.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* I refer to the reply that my hon. Friend gave on 25 April at column *152.*

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when he expects the inquiry into child care policy in Fife region to finish;

(2) when he expects to receive Sheriff Kearney's report on child care policy in Fife;

(3) whether the findings of the inquiry into child care policy in Fife will be made public;

(4) when he expects to publish the findings of the report into child care policy in Fife region.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* I understand that the inquiry is likely to complete

taking oral evidence in mid-December. Thereafter my right hon. and learned Friend looks forward to receiving Sheriff Kearney's report, so that he can decide whether it should be published.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he has assessed the impact of the inquiry into child care policies in Fife on the proper discharge of social work responsibilities by Fife regional council.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* Fife regional council welcomed the inquiry and agreed to co-operate fully with it. The council is responsible for the proper discharge of its responsibilities under the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 during the period of the inquiry, as at all other times.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list the persons or organisations consulted about child care policy in Fife prior to the announcement to set up the inquiry.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* Officials of the social work services group discussed aspects of child care policy in Fife with senior officials of the regional council, as well as representatives of the children's panel.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will set out the information and evidence upon which the decision was taken to hold an inquiry into child care policies in Fife.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* The background to the remit to the inquiry was set out in the memorandum which social work services group provided for the chairman in April 1989 and which he had circulated to the parties to the inquiry.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if any other form of investigation into child care policy in Fife was considered prior to the announcement to set up the inquiry.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* The decision to initiate an Inquiry under section 99 of the Children Act 1975 was taken only after an investigation of certain cases by professional advisers in the Scottish Office and after extensive discussions with senior officials of Fife regional council about aspects of the region's child care policies.

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) if he will list the representations received about child care policy in Fife prior to the announcement to set up the inquiry;

(2) what meeting or discussions were held with the chairman of the children's panel in Fife about child care policy in Fife prior to the announcement to set up the inquiry.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* Serious concerns about certain aspects of child care policy in Fife were expressed by representatives of the children's panel, including successive panel chairmen.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 14 November 1990

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Deaf People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Attorney-General what facilities are made available in the courts at all levels for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The Attorney-General: In the magistrates courts, it is for the court to ensure that it can communicate adequately with deaf persons appearing before it. Where a defendant who is deaf or hard of hearing does not himself arrange for the services of an interpreter, magistrates courts make use of interpreters provided through the agency of local directors of social services and voluntary bodies such as the Royal National Institute for the Deaf.

In the Crown court, and in the civil courts, interpreters must be provided by the parties. Court staff will always advise parties where a list of interpreters may be obtained. In Crown court cases fees for interpreters are paid from central funds. In civil cases the payment of fees is a matter for the parties.

Provided that court staff are given sufficient warning of the needs of a party or a witness who is hard of hearing, arrangements can generally be made to ensure that that person will be able to sit as close as possible to, and with an unobstructed view of, the judge and the witness box.

Many of the purpose-built courtrooms have excellent acoustics and many are equipped with microphone and public address systems which may be used to enhance the ability of the hard of hearing to follow proceedings.

Attendance Allowance Appeals

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Attorney-General what was the average waiting time from an appeal being made against an attendance allowance decision and the appeal decision, for the last period for which figures are available.

The Attorney-General: The office of the social security commissioners does not record information on the average waiting times for appeals in relation to individual categories of benefit or appeal.

PRIME MINISTER

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list those provisions in legislation which give local authorities powers in relation to a single ethnic minority group.

The Prime Minister: There are no such specific provisions in legislation, although section 71 of the Race Relations Act 1976 places a duty on local authorities to ensure that they carry out their various functions with due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote racial equality, and section 35 of that Act recognises that it is sometimes necessary to meet the special needs of racial groups regarding their education, training or welfare.

DEFENCE

Radar

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there has been any change in the financial arrangements for the relocatable over-the-horizon radar.

Mr. Alan Clark: No.

RAF Bentwaters/Woodbridge

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the reason for building new housing for United States personnel at RAF Bentwaters/Woodbridge.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) on 1 November, at column *770*.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gulf Crisis

Mr. Prescott: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at what time and day his Department learnt of the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi forces, in Greenwich mean time and Kuwait local time; and at what time British Airways was informed.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: It was not until approximately 0300 GMT (0600 Kuwait local time) on 2 August that we had clear evidence of a full-scale Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. This was approximately one hour after the closure of Kuwait airport. The news became public at about 0400 GMT (0700 Kuwait time).

Foreign Affairs Council

Mr. Colvin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish in the *Official Report* a statement on the outcome of the Foreign Affairs Council on 12 November.

Mr. Hurd: The Foreign Affairs Council met in Brussels on 12 November. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office represented the United Kingdom.

Ministers discussed the Iraq-Kuwait crisis and reaffirmed their determination to bring about the release of all hostages in Iraq and Kuwait, the refusal of their Governments to negotiate with Iraq and their condemnation of Iraqi treatment of hostages. They agreed to give the highest priority to the role of the United Nations and to continue to put pressure on Iraq to receive the Secretary-General's special representative. They agreed a United Kingdom proposal to make demarches to a large number of countries and groups of countries to convince them to pursue these same aims in contacts with the Iraqis.

The Council discussed the proposed EC/United States and EC/Canada declarations and asked the Commission and presidency to continue to work with the Americans and Canadians to achieve agreed texts to be exchanged in the margins of the Paris CSCE summit.

The Council had an initial discussion of the draft negotiating mandates for association agreements with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The United Kingdom looks forward to early detailed examination of the mandates with a view to their approval this year.

The Council reviewed policy towards Asia and Latin America and noted that the programme for the 1990s would be considered by a special Development Council later in the year. The Council discussed again the Commission's proposals for a new Mediterranean policy which were remitted for further detailed work. Finally, the Council discussed progress in the Community's negotiations with EFTA for the creation of a European economic area. The United Kingdom called for renewed EC efforts to maintain the momentum of the negotiations through a constructive approach to outstanding issues.

In the margins of the Council, Ministers held an informal meeting with Foreign Ministers of the Arab Maghreb Union. The meeting discussed a wide range of political and economic topics of mutual interest including the development of EC/AMU relations and the Gulf crisis. On behalf of the Twelve the EC presidency urged the AMU to join in exerting pressure on Iraq to accept the UN Secretary-General's envoy and to release all hostages.

TRANSPORT

Greater Manchester Relief Road

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many letters his Department has received from residents of Worsley, Whitefield, Radcliffe and Bury about the proposed Greater Manchester western and northern relief road; and how many of those supported the proposals as outlined in the White Paper "Roads for Prosperity".

Mr. Chope: Several letters have been received but none has been in support of the outline proposed in the White Paper. Full public consultation will take place after details of a route have been published.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will arrange for an environmental impact assessment to be carried out in respect of the Greater Manchester western and northern relief road route.

Mr. Chope: An environmental assesment will be undertaken before proposals are put forward for public comment.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the implications of the construction of the Denton to Middleton section of the M66 for the Greater Manchester western and northern relief road.

Mr. Chope: Completion of the M66 between Denton and Middleton will have no significant effect on traffic flows on the M62 west of junction 18. There are no implications for the Greater Manchester western and northern relief road.

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has revised the traffic forecasts for the Greater Manchester western and northern relief route.

Mr. Chope: We have not yet prepared detailed local traffic forecasts for this scheme.

Lancaster Avenue—Thurlow Park Road Junction

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the junction between Lancaster avenue and Thurlow Park road, London SE27.

Mr. Chope: The Department has no current proposals to improve the A205 south circular road at the junction of Thurlow Park road and Lancaster avenue. The London borough of Lambeth, as the Department's agents for this part of the trunk road, was asked in March 1988 to investigate the feasibility of improving traffic movement and safety at this junction. Its report is still awaited.

The Secretary of State recently decided to terminate the agency agreement with Lambeth with effect from 1 April 1991, and to appoint consultants instead. We shall ask the consultants to look into possible improvements to this junction.

Municipal Airports

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contributions have been made, net, from the charge fund to the running of municipal airports at Manchester, Birmingham, Luton and East Midlands; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: No such contributions have been made.

Lorries

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list all defects and contraventions discovered by checks carried out by his Department, the Health and Safety Executive and the police to assess on-the-road compliance with regulations for the mechanical safety and roadworthiness of lorries during the past three years.

Mr. Chope: Information on mechanical defects found at annual tests of heavy goods vehicles is given on page 19 of the vehicle inspectorate executive agency's annual report for 1989-90, and details of vehicles inspected at roadside spot checks with prohibition rates are given on page 22. Copies of the report are in the Library.

A27

Mr. Bellotti: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce detailed possible routes for the proposed dual carriageway between Lewes and Polegate on the A27; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: I hope that there will be public consultation on possible routes for the proposed A27 Lewes to Polegate improvement in late 1991. The timetable thereafter will depend on the issues that the consultation raises, the progress that can be made with the design of the chosen option and the statutory procedures.

Underground Escalators

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he has as to London Underground's policy towards easing access to the underground by the disabled, elderly or those with young children when escalators are out of action for considerable periods; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: During periods when escalators are unavailable, London Underground Ltd. attempts to ease

access for all its customers. It does so by providing alternative routes through stations, wherever possible, and by the use of temporary signs and announcements on stations and trains. In addition, uniformed staff, trained to take care of travellers with special needs, are at hand. Details of how people with mobility handicaps can plan the best routes to avoid escalators are set out in London Transport's publication "Access to the Underground", a copy of which is in the Library.

Fuels (Pollution)

Mr. Roger King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will discuss with the oil companies the development of less-polluting fuels for vehicles.

Mr. Chope: My Department and the Department of Energy are in frequent contact with the motor and the oil industries on this subject.

Vehicle Pollution

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what new measures he plans to reduce pollution caused by motor cars and lorries.

Mr. Chope: I have little to add to my hon. Friend's answer to the hon. Member for Newport, West on 30 October, columns *464-66*. The Government are doing everything they can to achieve the earliest possible agreement within the European Community on a new, consolidated directive to reduce car emissions. We shall also urge the Community to adopt tighter noise limits for all vehicles when this matter is discussed next year.

Air Accidents

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether the air accidents investigation branch of his Department proposes to make any recommendations to the Civil Aviation Authority to help it determine further action as a result of the reports of the crashes of two light aircraft on the Coal Aston airstrip, Derbyshire, published in the air accidents investigation branch bulletin 11/90.

Mr. McLoughlin: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on Thursday 1 November, Vol. 178, column *707*.

The Minches

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department will declare the Minches an area to be avoided; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: Her Majesty's Government took the lead in establishing the internationally recognised deep water route to the west of the outer Hebrides. This is clearly marked on charts, with a recommendation that laden tankers of over 10,000 gross registered tonnage should use it instead of the Minch when weather conditions permit.

It is important that tanker masters retain the freedom to use the Minch in poor weather. The outer route in the Atlantic is subject to much stronger winds and rougher seas than the sheltered waters of the Minch, and greater stresses are thus imposed on both vessels and crew. These stresses slightly increase the chances of an equipment failure. More significantly, the weather conditions and the remoteness of the outer route mean that in the event of failure, the chances of preventing the vessel from going ashore are lessened. In poor weather, therefore, the chances of both loss of life and pollution may be greater if the vessels use the outer route than if they go through the Minch.

In these circumstances the Government's role must be to ensure maximum use of the outer route in appropriate conditions. An "area to be avoided" is recommendatory and the Government are not convinced that establishing one in the Minch would have any greater effect than the existing recommendatory deep water route. An alternative sometimes suggested is a mandatory traffic separation scheme in the Minch. The problem with this is that it might encourage tankers to take the route through the Minch. It would also inhibit fishing vessels, which would be obliged to comply with its provisions.

The Government consider that the best course is to continue to urge the use of the outer route in appropriate conditions, internationally through the International Maritime Organisation, nationally by contact with the oil companies and locally by means of notices to mariners issued at Sullom Voe.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the public inquiry into the east London river crossing to be concluded.

Mr. Chope *[holding answer 13 November 1990]:* The conduct of the inquiry and the timing of its closure are matters for the inspectors of the joint inquiries, but I understand that there is a full programme arranged until the Christmas recess.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Refugee Children

Miss Lestor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Refugee Council's proposals to provide reception and assessment services to unaccompanied refugee children.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: No. The Refugee Council's proposals to provide reception and assessment services to unaccompanied refugee children were sent to the Minister for Health and my right hon. and learned Friend. They make a useful contribution to consideration of the issues in this complex area and are being considered by both Departments. I intend to respond to the Refugee Council, on behalf of both Departments, as soon as possible.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he has issued to electoral registration officers regarding the removal of electors from the register; what degree of discretion electoral registration officers have in applying Home Office guidelines; whether electoral registration officers seek advice from local authorities; for what purposes electoral registration officers may use the community charge register; and what statutory duties local authorities have with regard to canvassing potential electors for inclusion in the electoral register.

Mrs. Rumbold: In a circular issued on 10 August 1990 as part of its guidance to electoral registration officers (EROs) in England and Wales, the Home Office made recommendations about the use of information on the community charge register in compiling the electoral register. This included that a person's name should not be carried forward from one electoral register to the next if that person does not respond to the electoral canvass and his or her name does not appear on the community charges register. It also recommended that where such a name does appear in the community charges register it should not be carried forward for more than one year without further inquiries to establish eligibility.

Electoral registration officers are responsible to the courts in the performance of their statutory duties and are not obliged to follow Home Office guidance. They are appointed, in England and Wales, by district or London borough councils and are free to seek advice, including legal advice, from the local authority by which they were appointed, or its officers, if they so wish.

Under section 29 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, EROs in England and Wales may, for the purpose of exercising their functions, inspect the community charges register of any charging authority. The purpose of the Home Office guidance issued on 10 August was to enable and encourage EoOs to make the fullest and most effective use of this right of access, to assist in the preparation of an accurate electoral register.

Electoral registration officers have a statutory duty to prepare and publish each year registers of electors for the area for which they are responsible. To this end, they are required to have a house-to-house or other sufficient inquiry made as to the persons entitled to be registered.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by location for the three counties Yorkshire and Humberside, and by year for the last four years to date, the local authorities that have developed emergency control centres; and how many *(a)* emergency planning officers and *(b)* clerical support staff for emergency planning officers have been employed.

Mr. John Patten: The following emergency centres have been established to meet minimum recommended Home Office standards over the past four years:

County	*Emergency Centre*	*Year*
North Yorkshire	Craven	1989-90
North Yorkshire	Richmond	1987-88
North Yorkshire	Scarborough	1988-89
West Yorkshire	County Standby (located in Calderdale)	1990-91
West Yorkshire	Calderdale	1990-91
Humberside	County Standby (co-located with Great Grimsby)	1989-90
Humberside	Beverley	1987-88
Humberside	Cleethorpes	1987-88
Humberside	East Yorkshire	1989-90

The number of *(a)* emergency planning officers and *(b)* clerical support staff employed over the last four years are:

	North Yorkshire		*South Yorkshire*		*West Yorkshire*		*Humberside*	
	(a)	*(b)*	*(a)*	*(b)*	*(a)*	*(b)*	*(a)*	*(b)*
1987-88	10	4	12	3	11	3	10	6
1988-89	10	4	12	3	12	3	10	6
1989-90	10	4	12	3	13	3	10	6
1990-91[1]	10	4	12	4	14	3	10	6

[1] Estimated.

South Yorkshire Police (Dedicated Suites)

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list by location for the South Yorkshire police force those that have *(a)* dedicated rape suites, *(b)* dedicated domestic violence units and *(c)* dedicated child abuse (i) units and (ii) suites.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Dedicated rape suites are situated at Phoenix house, Doncaster, Barnsley district general hospital, and the sexual offences and child investigation unit at Wath.

There are no dedicated domestic violence units in the force area, but consideration is currently being given to incorporating the work of such units in the facilities which are already provided for the reception and interviewing of victims of sexual offences.

Child abuse units have been established at police divisional headquarters at Heeley and the Old Police house at Wath; there are child abuse suites at Phoenix house, Doncaster, the sexual offences and child abuse investigation unit at Wath, and the Children's hospital at Sheffield.

Horserace Totalisator Board

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the chairman of the Horserace Totalisator Board was appointed; and when his appointment will terminate.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The chairman of the Horserace Totalisator Board, Lord Wyatt of Weeford, has been chairman of the Tote since 1 May 1976. His present term of appointment runs to 30 April 1991.

Remand Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of remand prisoners being held in prisons in England and Wales on 1 January and 1 November.

Mrs. Rumbold: At the end of December 1989, 9,485 untried and convicted unsentenced prisoners were held in prison service establishments in England and Wales and none in police cells. The corresponding figures for the end of September 1990, the latest date for which the information is available, were 9,377 in prison service establishments and 768 in police cells.

Belmarsh Prison

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women prison officers will be employed at Belmarsh prison.

Mrs. Rumbold: Individual prison officers have not yet been allocated to Belmarsh in significant numbers. It is therefore not known how many female officers will work there.

Police Cells

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide figures for each month, from May onwards, for the number of remand prisoners and newly sentenced prisoners being held in police cells in the three counties of Yorkshire and Humberside police authority areas who would normally have been housed in Her Majesty's prison establishments; and if he will show in his answer by month *(a)* the location of the police cells, *(b)* their sex and *(c)* the number of prisoners they have had under their care.

Mrs. Rumbold: The average number of prisoners, who have been held in police cells in the Humberside and Yorkshire police authority areas each month since May 1990, are given in the table. All the prisoners are male.

	Number
May	203
June	247
July	204
August	219
September	345
October	295
November	[1]291

[1] Average to date.

The police cells which were in use for this purpose on Monday 12 November 1990, are given in the table:

Police cells	*Number of prisoners*
Humberside	
Beverley	12
Grimsby	32
Hull	37
Scunthorpe	9
North Yorkshire	
Clifford street, York	9
Northallerton	9
Richmond	9
South Kirkby	6
York	3
South Yorkshire	
Barnsley	5
Doncaster	29
Eccleshill	17
Rotherham	11
Sheffield	20
West Yorkshire	
Bingley	3
Brighouse	4
Dewsbury	5
Halifax	10
Holmfirth	4
Huddersfield-Bridewell	14
Keighley	6
Leeds-Bridewell	6
Millgarth	8
Morley	7
Shipley	4
Weetwood	8
Wetherby	6
Wood street, Wakefield	10

This information is not collected in a way that enables remand and newly sentenced prisoners to be readily identified separately. Details of the police stations in use for the whole of the period in question could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Women Prison Officers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of women prison officers working in male prisons in England and Wales on 1 November.

Mrs. Rumbold: On 1 November, 441 women prison officers were working in male prisons in England and Wales.

Deaf People

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidelines are issued to probation officers to ensure that the needs of deaf people or those who are hard of hearing are taken into account when reports are being prepared for the courts prior to sentencing.

Mr. John Patten: Current guidance to the probation service on social inquiry reports (SIRs) is contained in Home Office circular 92 of 1986, a copy of which is in the Library. This circular emphasises the need for the SIR to contain an impartial and objective assessment tailored to the circumstances of the individual offender. The offender's deafness or other hearing impairment would be referred to in the SIR if the officer considered that it was relevant to the court's decision on how to deal with that offender. If the hon. Member has a particular case in mind perhaps he would write to me.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 27 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. Bibi, 95 Boreford road, Manchester.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This case has involved making inquiries abroad, which have now been completed. I hope to reply shortly.

ENERGY

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy (1) why page 149 of the electricity privatisation pathfinder prospectus makes no reference to Labour party commitments on insulation, energy conservation or the establishment of the Renewable Energy Agency;

(2) why page 149 of the electricity privatisation pathfinder prospectus made no mention of the need for long-term contracts to promote the use of renewable energy services covered on page 24 of the Labour party document "An Earthly Chance".

Mr. Wakeham: As is stated, pages 148 and 149 of the pathfinder prospectus provide only a summary of those Labour party policies which Her Majesty's Government believe are of particular relevance to the flotation of the regional electricity companies.

Energy Council

Mr. John Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will make a statement on the outcome of the European Community's Council of Energy Ministers on 29 October.

Mr. Wakeham: The Council took further steps to liberalise the Community's energy market. The directive on the transit of electricity, on which political agreement had been reached at the previous Energy Council earlier this year, was adopted. A broad agreement was reached by qualified majority on the parallel directive on gas transit, opening the way for a common position at a later date. Although the directives do not go far towards liberalising the Community's energy markets, the United Kingdom has supported them as a step in that direction. The Council also agreed, subject to the opinion of the European Parliament, to the repeal of the 1975 directive controlling the use of gas in generating electricity. The United Kingdom has long sought the repeal of that outdated measure.

The Council also discussed the current oil situation and concluded that world market supplies were adequate and that member states' stocks were high. It also agreed that the Commission's proposals to update existing contingency measures needed further study.

The Commission introduced the proposed SAVE programme (specific actions for vigorous energy efficiency) which is intended to co-ordinate member states' own energy efficiency programmes. The Council welcomed the initiative which is intended among other things to lead to action on energy efficiency labelling and minimum standards for electrical appliances. The initiative emphasises the need for market-based measures.

There was also on 29 October a joint Energy/Environment Council. I refer my hon. Friend to the written reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Swindon (Mr. Coombs) by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment on 31 October 1990, *Official Report*, columns *540-42*.

WALES

NHS Surplus Land and Property

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what was the value of sales of surplus national health service land and properties in total and by health authority for each financial year since 1979 in *(a)* cash prices and *(b)* constant prices.

Mr. Grist: The information requested for the years 1983-84 to 1989-90 is shown in table 2. Cash prices are shown for all years and constant prices are revaluations at 1989-90 price levels.

Details relating to land and property sales between 1979-80 and 1982-83 by health authority are not available. Total figures for this period were:

Table 1

	Cash prices £	*Constant prices (at 1989-90 price levels)* £
1979-80	200,000	403,000
1980-81	700,000	1,192,000
1981-82	200,000	310,000
1982-83	1,400,000	2,025,000

Table 2
NHS Land and Property Sales—Receipts

£s rounded to nearest '000

	1983-84	*1984-85*	*1985-86*	*1986-87*	*1987-88*	*1988-89*	*1989-90*
Clwyd							
Cash Prices	341	119	95	383	Nil	63	44
Constant Prices	471	157	119	463	Sales	67	44
East Dyfed							
Cash Prices	Nil	Nil	286	78	295	90	35
Constant Prices	Sales	Sales	357	94	339	96	35
Gwent							
Cash Prices	223	108	209	108	67	323	141
Constant Prices	308	142	261	131	77	346	141
Gwynedd							
Cash Prices	26	31	16	1,031	Nil	49	918
Constant Prices	36	41	20	1,246	Sales	52	918
Mid Glamorgan							
Cash Prices	119	156	672	737	663	145	532
Constant Prices	164	205	839	891	761	155	532
Pembroke							
Cash Prices	2	25	Nil	Nil	43	250	144
Constant Prices	3	33	Sales	Sales	49	268	144
Powys							
Cash Prices	58	43	237	57	53	438	66
Constant Prices	80	57	296	69	61	469	66
South Glamorgan							
Cash Prices	18	476	60	67	429	165	Nil
Constant Prices	25	627	75	81	492	177	Sales
West Glamorgan							

	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88	1988-89	1989-90
Cash Prices	Nil	389	40	230	121	268	3,594
Constant Prices	Sales	512	50	278	139	287	3,594
TOTAL							
Cash Prices	787	1,347	1,615	2,691	1,671	1,790	5,475
Constant Prices	1,087	1,774	2,017	3,253	1,918	1,917	5,475

Ministerial Advisers

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will state the terms of reference of the appointment of the special adviser, Mr. Rod Richards, in the Welsh Office, indicating whether this appointment is for a fixed term or is a permanent appointment.

Mr. David Hunt: Mr. Rod Richards has been appointed personally by me to advise on subjects that I will specify and for as long as I consider necessary.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will set out the salary, hours, terms and conditions of the appointment of Mr. Rod Richards as his personal adviser and the period for which the appointment will run;

(2) if he will list all his personal advisers who are paid for from public funds with the total annual cost of each adviser and the topics upon which each is called to advise him.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on Tuesday 13 November, column *106*.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Aid and Trade

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether there are departmental guidelines regarding the ratio of aid and trade provision grants to the total cost of the aid and trade provision supported contract.

Mrs. Chalker: Grants from the aid and trade provision are made in accordance with OECD consensus rules and thus currently cover a minimum of 50 per cent. of the United Kingdom content of the contract for least-developed countries and a minimum of 35 per cent. of the United Kingdom content of the contract for other developing countries.

Turkey

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list all aid to Turkey since 1979 under *(a)* country programme aid, *(b)* aid and trade provision, *(c)* multilateral aid and *(d)* other aid, respectively.

Mrs. Chalker: Details available of British aid given to Turkey since 1979 are as follows:

£'000

	Country programme aid	ATP	Multilateral aid attributable to United Kingdom	Other
1979	4,198	—	n/a	54
1980	8,019	—	960	16
1981	32,105	—	3,670	4
1982	16,872	—	3,220	10
1983	5,302	—	6,220	96
1984	375	—	6,960	32
1985	10,253	—	3,010	27
1986	4,627	—	13,850	23
1987	2,462	559	5,160	20
1988	1,365	1,044	2,920	51
1989	714	2,384	n/a	591

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what is the purpose of the natural gas conversion project in Turkey;

(2) what arrangements were made by his Department for seeking tenders for the natural gas conversion project in Turkey;

(3) when aid was offered for the natural gas conversion project in Turkey; whether aid has been disbursed; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: The main objective of the project is to convert Ankara's gas distribution system to natural gas and to improve and extend the system. The conversion to natural gas will assist the eradication of severe atmospheric problems caused by the present use of oil, coal and lignite as domestic fuels. The contract with the Ankara electricity, gas and omnibus authority was awarded after international competitive tender. The offer of aid to the Turkish Government to support a long-term concessional loan was made on 9 March 1987. Disbursements to date total £3,426,481 and represent payments in respect of interest due on the loan which is funding 85 per cent. of the cost of British goods and services.

Southern Africa

Mrs. Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what percentage of aid to southern Africa is tied to the purchase of British goods; what percentage is for local costs; whether there are any procurement conditions which encourage procurement from countries other than the recipient within the southern Africa region; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Chalker: In 1988, the last year for which we have figures, the proportion of our bilateral aid to southern Africa, defined as the present membership of the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference (SADCC) plus South Africa, tied to the purchase of British goods was 76 per cent., and the proportion for local costs was 2 per cent. Proportions vary from year to year and from country to country.

However, Britain announced in September this year that procurement under British financial aid to countries listed by the United Nations as least developed would in future be opened up to producers in all developing

countries with a GNP per capita of up to US $1,135 in 1989. In southern Africa the least-developed countries are Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania. Of the countries in the region, only Botswana, the Republic of South Africa and Namibia, for which we have no data, are thought to have had a GNP per capita of more than US $1,135 in 1989.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Incomes

Mr. Maxton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give the same figures as those provided in his answer of 29 October, *Official Report*, columns *363-64 (a)* exclusive of privatised investment and *(b)* deflated by the general deflator.

Mr. Norman Lamont: Figures, excluding privatised investment, are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Regional deflators are not calculated and the CSO believes that the use of a deflator which applies to total United Kingdom investment may lead to misleading figures. It also believes that it would be inappropriate to apply the United Kingdom deflator to foreign investment.

Estimates of United Kingdom manufacturing investment at current and constant prices are given in tables 13.6 and 13.7 of the 1990 edition of the "United Kingdom National Accounts" (Blue Book) which is available in the Library.

Shareholders

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will update his answer to the hon. Member for Newham, North-West (Mr. Banks) *Official Report*, 18 November 1986, column *82*, as to the number of individual shareholders retaining shares in each of the concerns privatised since 1979.

Mr. Maude: The table shows the number of shareholdings in each of the companies privatised since 1979. Where Her Majesty's Government retained a shareholding on privatisation this has also been shown.

Shareholdings[1] in privatised and former government-controlled companies

Company	*Date of Privatisation*	*Initial*	*Highest since privatisation*		*Size of share register Current*		*Proportion of shares initially retained by HMG*	*Proportion and dates of subsequent HMG disposals*
			Number	*Date*	*Number*	*Date*		
British Aerospace	February 1981	157,829	120,200	December 1986	97,600	December 1989	48·43%	48·43%/10 May 1985
Cable and Wireless	October 1981	27,320	210,994	March 1986	166,179	31 March 1990	50·64%	27·54%/November 1983: 23·1%/December 1985
Amersham International	February 1982	10,051	8,601	June 1982	5,787	June 1990	Nil	
Britoil	November 1982	37,257	241,000		owned by BP		49%	49%/8 August 1985
Associated British Ports	February 1983	37,205	12,321	July 1989	12,000	31 December 1989	48·5%	48·5%/17 April 1984
Enterprise Oil	June 1984	13,695	14,166	January 1985	10,207	31 December 1989	Nil	
Jaguar	July 1984	125,000	64,126	November 1984	owned by Ford		Nil	
British Telecom	November 1984	2,051,373	1,649,722	November 1985	1,200,655	31 March 1990	49·8%	0·8%/December 1987
British Gas	December 1986	4,407,079	3,100,000	July 1987	2,480,564	30 April 1990	3·3%	1·6%/January 1990: 1·6%/July 1990
British Airways	February 1987	1,200,000	450,000	July 1987	314,039	15 May 1990	2·5%	1%/June 1987: 1%/March 1990
Rolls Royce	May 1987	2,000,000	925,000	December 1987	738,659	31 December 1989	0·4%	0·4% sold during 1987
BAA	July 1987	2,187,500	1,350,000	November 1987	798,643	June 1990	4·36%	1·42%/August 1990
British Steel	December 1988	650,000	400,000	January 1989	318,025	23 August 1990	0·05%	0·04% disposed of during 1989. On 12 November 1990 HMG held about 0·002%
Water and Sewerage Companies	December 1989	2,650,000[2]	N/A		1,318,352[2]	June 1990	1·62%	

[1] These figures are not an exact guide to the number of shareholders in each company because some holdings are held jointly in more than one name. They also include holdings in employee share schemes.

[2] The offer allowed for holdings by individuals in any or all of the 10 companies and therefore holders may appear on more than one register.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Discussions

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Minister for Trade last met Mr. Henderson of Matrix-Churchill; what was discussed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: As far as I am aware, I have never met Mr. Henderson.

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were the topics discussed between the Minister for Trade and Mr. Bailey, of BSA Tools Ltd. and Automatia Investments Ltd., at their meeting on 19 October; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury: I met Mr. Bailey and other representatives of the Machine Tool Trade Association on 24 October. It is not our practice to disclose the content of such private discussions.

Liberia

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many licences for the export of armoured vehicles, aircraft and other military equipment to Liberia were granted in 1989; what level of underwriting by the Export Credits Guarantee Department of the sale of such equipment was approved; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* Two individual export licences for military equipment were issued for Liberia in 1989.

ECGD has been unable to identify any credit underwritten by the Department in 1989 in respect of the export of military equipment to Liberia.

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under what guidelines the Export Credits Guarantee Department operated on the granting of cover for the former regime in Liberia; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 13 November 1990]:* ECGD cover has been and remains available for exports to Liberia on short-term credit—up to 180 days—where payment is secured by irrevocable letters of credit from acceptable banks.

No support for medium-term credit has been available since 1980 except for the sale of ships where payment is wholly secured from outside Liberia. No such ships business has, however, been undertaken during the past five years.

Exporters (Insurance)

Ms. Quin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department requires the Export Credits Guarantee Department to take environmental considerations into account when giving insurance cover to exporters.

Mr. Sainsbury *[holding answer 13 November 1990]:* The Export Credits Guarantee Department is seeking to establish appropriate means to take account of environmental considerations when giving insurance cover to exporters as required under the terms of the Montreal protocol.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Religious Education

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will list the standing advisory committees on religious education which have sent an annual report to the National Curriculum Council.

Mr. Eggar: The Education Reform Act requires all standing advisory councils on religious education to publish an annual report of their work. My right hon. and learned Friend has said that he believes that copies of SACRE reports should be sent to local schools and teacher training institutions and to the National Curriculum Council, although there is no fixed timetable for doing so. We understand that the NCC has currently received 45 reports.

Nursery Education, Stockport

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what is the current provision for nursery education within the metropolitan borough of Stockport.

Mr. Eggar: The current nursery provision in the metropolitan borough of Stockport is nine nursery schools and 16 nursery classes attached to infant or primary schools.

Teacher Training

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what was the intake to teacher training courses in England and Wales in 1989-90; and what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the numbers to provide for the needs of primary and secondary schools and institutions of further education in the years after 1993.

Mr. Fallon: In 1989 over 21,700 students started approved courses leading to qualification to teach in schools in the maintained sector in England and Wales: 1,500 more than in 1988 and 2·5 per cent. above our target. The targets take account of our assessment of future demand for teachers in maintained primary and secondary schools. The Government do not control the intakes or the course content of training for teaching in further education institutions. My right hon. and learned Friend intends to publish shortly a document describing our projections of school teacher demand and supply, a copy of which will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has concerning the proportion of students graduating from teacher training institutions who do not enter the teaching profession.

Mr. Fallon: Some 70 per cent. of newly qualified teachers enter teaching in maintained schools in England and Wales immediately after successfully completing their training. A further 10 per cent. enter after a year or more. Some of the other 20 per cent. will go into teaching in FE colleges, in independent schools or in other countries.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many students enrolled on teacher training courses *(a)* this year, *(b)* in 1989, and *(c)* in 1985.

Mr. Fallon: Data on recruitment to teacher training courses in the current academic year are being collected and will be available shortly.

The annual intakes to initial teacher training courses in 1989 and 1985 were as follows:

	Total	*BEd*	*PGCE*
1989	21,757	10,812	10,945
1985	16,725	8,053	8,672

School Crossings

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what extra financial provision is made available to local education authorities to provide protection to school children, by supplying adequate traffic patrol and crossing services outside schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: Provision for local authority spending on school crossing patrols and road safety is not separately earmarked within annual local authority grant settlements, although it is taken into account in determining those settlements and their allocation between the relevant services for grant distribution purposes. It is then for each local authority to decide, within the overall resources available to it, what level of spending is appropriate in its circumstances to ensure adequate traffic patrol and crossing services.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many unfilled teacher vacancies there were at the start of the present terms in *(a)* England and *(b)* Greater London; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: All 109 LEAs responded to the Department's survey of teacher vacancies at the start of this term. They reported 1,470 vacancies in England, of which 561 were in Greater London. Detailed results are in the Library. They show that LEAs worked very hard and with considerable success to fill over 23,500 vacancies during the summer.

A-levels

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to make a statement on the future of the GCE A-level examination.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend will make a statement after he has received and considered the further advice which he requested from the School Examinations and Assessment Council, together with all other views expressed to him. He expects to receive this advice around the turn of the year.

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning this summer's GCE A-level examination results; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend has received two letters. Representations about individual GCE examination results which cannot be resolved through the normal appeals mechanisms should be addressed to the independent appeals authority for school examinations (IAASE).

GCSE

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning this summer's GCSE examination results; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: My right hon. and learned Friend and I have received five representations on this issue. We would expect inquiries about individual results which cannot be resolved through the appeals mechanisms of the examining groups to be addressed to the independent appeals authority for school examinations.

Teachers (Recruitment)

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what information he has concerning the number of former teachers re-entering the profession; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: In 1987—the most recent year for which reliable data are available—some 16,200 former teachers returned to the profession; over half all entrants. The Government are supporting LEA expenditure of £12 million over two years, 1990-92, which will help authorities to maintain the recruitment of returners at a high level.

Numeracy

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what representations he has received concerning the numeracy standards of school leavers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Ministers have received a small number of letters from individuals expressing concern about the numeracy standards of school leavers. The proportion of candidates achieving grades A to C in GCSE mathematics in 1990 rose by 2·1 per cent. to 40·2 per cent. compared with 1989.

Dyslexic Students

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what co-ordination is exercised through his Department to ensure that examination boards provide similar facilities for the benefit of specific categories of dyslexic students; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: This Department has no powers to ensure that the independent GCSE examining groups make such provision. The groups have, however, agreed common arrangements to ensure that, as far as possible, candidates should not be disadvantaged by their dyslexia. I will write to the hon. Member about a particular case which he has brought to the attention of my right hon. and learned Friend.

School Leaving Age

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proposals his Department has to promote full-time participation in education after the age of 16 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Eggar: Full-time participation in post-compulsory education has increased substantially over recent years. For 16-year-olds in England, it has increased by about 15 percentage points, from 40 per cent. in 1978-79 to over 55 per cent. in 1989-90. Between 1987-88 and 1989-90 alone, the improvement has been seven percentage points, mainly attributable to the introduction of the GCSE.

As my right hon. and learned Friend said on 13 November, *Official Report*, column 484, he will strive to achieve further increases in the number of young people receiving some form of education and training. Our examination reforms are raising standards in schools, giving more young people the qualifications and motivation to stay on. As the Education Reform Act comes increasingly into effect, we can expect standards to continue to rise and more young people to choose to stay on. The Government will keep under review whether more needs to be done.

Student Unions

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what action he proposes to take concerning local student unions, the National Union of Students and freedom of speech; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Alan Howarth: I will shortly embark on consultations with representatives of the higher education

institutions and various student bodies on the operation of the 1986 legislation on freedom of speech in higher and further education institutions; on the pattern of membership and financing of local student unions and the NUS; and on the proper use of public funds by local student unions and the NUS.

ENVIRONMENT

Nature Conservancy Council

15. **Mr. Pawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much funding for the Nature Conservancy Council has increased since 1979; and what level of funding is proposed for the council in the coming financial year.

Mr. Trippier: Grant in aid to the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) has risen from £7·9 million in 1979-80 to £44·819 million in 1990-91. Funding for the NCC's successor body in England, the Nature Conservancy Council for England, has been set provisionally at £32·411 million for 1991-92, with £1·05 million allocated to the NCC's residuary body. Provision of £1·093 million has been made for the transfer of the NCC's pension liabilities to my Department. Allocations for the Nature Conservancy Council for Scotland and the Countryside Council for Wales have not yet been announced.

Homelessness

16. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what measures he is taking to provide accommodation for the homeless.

Mr. Michael Spicer: My Department is making available capital resources of nearly £2 billion to local authorities in 1991-92. Support for housing associations through the Housing Corporation will rise to £1·7 billion in 1991-92 and to over £2 billion by 1993-94. The special homelessness allocation for local authorities and housing associations in London and the south-east has now been increased to £300 million over this year and next. In addition we are providing £100 million between now and 1993 for the initiative to combat single homelessness in London.

Rural Development Commission

17. **Mr. Barry Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he next intends to meet the chairman of the Rural Development Commission to discuss progress relating to the economic and social development of rural areas.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and Countryside plans to meet Lord Shuttleworth shortly.

Waste Paper

18. **Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what change there has been in 1990 in the recycling of waste paper; what recent initiatives he has taken to encourage the recycling of waste paper; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Over 2,000,000 tonnes of waste paper were recycled during the first nine months of this year, which is a 12 per cent. increase over 1989. The Environmental Protection Act requires all collection authorities to draw up and publish recycling plans; and will give financial help through the system of recycling credits.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

20. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what action is proposed to reduce emission of carbon dioxide over the next year.

Mr. Chris Patten: The White Paper on the environment —"This Common Inheritance"—which was published in September outlines a range of measures we intend to take to curb emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

English Heritage

21. **Mr. Couchman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what increase he plans next year in funding for English Heritage.

Mr. Chris Patten: Grant in aid to English Heritage in 1991-92 will total £89·2 million. This is £9·5 million above previous plans and includes the first £2 million tranche of new money for repair grants to historic cathedrals. Over the three years to 1993-94 resources for cathedral repairs will total £11·5 million. The increases for English Heritage's existing activities will enable it to strengthen its grant programmes for other church and secular buildings and to press on with visitor facility and maintenance works at some of its important properties-in-care. In addition, the extra resources will enable English Heritage to take forward a number of the initiatives set out in the White Paper, "This Common Inheritance"—in particular greater priority for assistance to historic town centres and industrial heritage, a comprehensive register of historic landscapes and gardens to inform the planning process, and the development of heritage-related education initiatives. By 1993-94 grant in aid to English Heritage is planned to increase to over £100 million.

National Rivers Authority

22. **Mr. David Davis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress of the National Rivers Authority and on his future plans for funding it.

37. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any proposals to increase the funding or powers available to the National Rivers Authority.

Mr. Trippier: In its first year of existence the National Rivers Authority has shown itself to be a dedicated and effective guardian of the water environment. The Government announced substantial extra financial support for the National Rivers Authority in the autumn statement. Grant in aid will be increased for 1991-92 by £23 million to £106 million, an increase of 28 per cent. over previous plans. Together with increased income from charges on dischargers, this will enable the authority to increase its total spend on environmental activities next year to about £217 million compared to this year's level of some £170 million.

Kirklees Henry Boot Partnership Ltd.

23. **Mr. Riddick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the Government have provided any financial support for the Kirklees council Henry Boot joint venture company; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The Government have provided no financial support to the Kirklees Henry Boot Partnership Ltd.

Bedfordshire County Council

24. **Mr. Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the percentage increase of external finance that Bedfordshire county council will receive in 1991-92 as compared with 1990-91; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: The provisional figures issued by my right hon. Friend on 31 October indicate a 23·9 per cent. increase in the total level of external support for districts in Bedfordshire taken together.

Derelict Land

25. **Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much derelict land has been reclaimed through the use of derelict land grant and the activity of the urban development corporations.

Mr. Atkins: Figures for the amount of land reclaimed with the aid of derelict land grant before 1974 are not available. In the period 1974-75 to 1989-90 a total of 20,366 hectares was reclaimed. Urban development corporations have reclaimed over 1,200 hectares in their areas since designation.

Liverpool City Council

26. **Mr. Parry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he has any plans to meet the leader of the Liverpool city council to discuss central Government funding for the city.

Mr. Portillo: In response to a request from the city council for a meeting to discuss a number of issues, I have written to the leader suggesting that we should arrange it as soon as convenient.

Domestic Waste

27. **Mr. Trimble:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what steps are contemplated to reduce the use of open landfill as a means of disposing of domestic waste.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Landfill, properly located and operated to the highest standards, is expected to remain a major option for the disposal of domestic waste in the United Kingdom. Recommended standards need to be imposed through disposal licensing controls and these should include requirements for daily cover of tipping areas and the consequent reduction of open operations to the minimum. The provisions of the newly enacted Environmental Protection Act 1990 will improve the effectiveness of licensing controls and similar legislation will be brought forward for Northern Ireland.

Rates (Brent)

28. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment by how much non-domestic rate poundages increased over and above inflation in Brent between 1979-80 and 1989-90.

Mr. Portillo: The rate poundage in Brent increased by 89 per cent. between 1979-80 and 1989-90 over inflation. During the same period, locally set non-domestic rate poundages in England rose by an average of 37·4 per cent. more than the retail prices index. This contrasts vividly with the new system under which the national non-domestic rating multiplier cannot rise by more than the rate of inflation.

Birds

29. **Mr. John Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about proposed reform of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 about the protection of birds.

Mr. Chris Patten: I have received many representations in response to the proposal to introduce a licensing scheme for the control of pest bird species which we put forward as a way of bringing our practice into line with the requirements of the EC birds directive. The great majority of those responding argued that there are no conservation reasons for changing the law and that our traditional practices are fully in line with the spirit of the directive. The Government agree and I therefore intend to take no further action on this proposal but shall continue to press the European Commission to bring forward a proposal for amending the directive so that member states can operate sensible pest control practices.

Shared Purchase Schemes

30. **Mr. Bowis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many properties have been bought by *(a)* a council tenants and *(b)* housing association tenants either outright or through shared purchase schemes in the past 10 years.

Mr. Michael Spicer: It is estimated that 1·1 million council tenants and 53,000 housing association tenants purchased their homes either outright or through shared ownership schemes in England in the years 1980-81 to 1989-90.

Waste Recycling

31. **Sir Trevor Skeet:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what policy instruments he proposes to use to encourage more recycling of waste.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Environmental Protection Act 1990 sets a framework designed to promote recycling. The new duty of care on disposers of waste will increase the standards required in disposing of waste by landfill. The Act requires all local authorities involved in waste disposal and collection to give priority to recycling, wherever practicable, in their plans: and allows authorities to specify environmentally friendly options for waste disposal, such as recycling, even if they are not the cheapest in financial terms. The Act also requires local authorities to pay recycling credits and those involved in waste collection to produce recycling plans.

The White Paper on the environment "This Common Inheritance" sets out a number of measures that we will be pursuing to ensure successful recycling. We will be pressing industry to increase both the recycling of materials and the use of recycled material; encouraging retailers to provide collection facilities for recyclable material for their customers; and persuading industry to expand its capacity to process reclaimed material.

In his autumn statement the Chancellor announced that £40 million in supplementary credit approvals will be available over the next three years to enable local authorities to invest in facilities and equipment needed to set up effective recycling schemes.

The White Paper was printed on recycled paper and my Department is setting an example in its use of recycled paper for all ministerial correspondence and for photocopying.

Sewage Outfalls

32. **Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution his Department will make to the costs of providing full treatment in respect of new sewage outfalls.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The costs of providing treatment will, in the first instance, fall to the sewerage undertakers, but may be eligible for consideration for cost-pass-through under the terms of their licences. This will be a matter for the Director General of Water Services to determine.

River Pollution

33. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the importance of river pollution as a contributor to North sea pollution; and what is Britain's contribution to the problem.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Rivers and estuaries are the most important source of contaminants in the North sea and, together with direct coastal discharges, represent about 40 per cent. of total North sea pollution.

A recent study by the International Centre for Water Studies in Amsterdam indicates that the Rhine and Elbe are the most significant of these, together contributing about 65 per cent. of river-borne contaminants. The United Kingdom accounts for about 20 per cent. of the river-borne total.

Local Government Finance

34. **Mr. Andy Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on progress in collecting the community charge in Nottinghamshire.

Mr. Key: I understand that over 85 per cent. of charge payers in Nottinghamshire had made payments up to the end of September. The figures vary between a creditable 94·7 per cent. in Broxtowe borough council to a disappointing 67·9 per cent. so far in Nottingham city council. I look to all charging authorities to make full use of their wide powers to see that these figures approach 100 per cent. during the next five years.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list to date for the South Yorkshire valuation and community charge tribunal how many applications have been lodged in respect of the community charge; how many objections to domestic rates are still ourstanding; what are the figures for the other counties of Yorkshire and Humberside; and by what percentage these figures differ from the national average.

Mr. Key: The information requested is as follows:

Community Charge Appeals

	Total appeals received to date	*Variation from national average per cent.*
South Yorkshire VCCT	73	−28
North Yorkshire VCCT	218	+116
West Yorkshire VCCT	110	+9
Humberside VCCT	763	+655
Total appeals in England	[1]4,230	—
National VCCT average	[1]101	—

[1]At 30 September 1990.

Domestic Rating Appeals

	Appeals outstanding	
	Number	*Per cent.*
South Yorkshire VCCT	2,660	+19
North Yorkshire VCCT	1,494	−33
West Yorkshire VCCT	2,623	+17
Humberside VCCT	1,566	−30
National VCCT average	[1]2,235	—

[1]At 30 September 1990.

Business Rates

35. **Mr. Butterfill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what was the national increase in the business rate poundage in real terms in the 10 years to 1989-90.

Mr. Key: In the period 1979-80 to 1989-90 locally set non-domestic rate poundages in England rose by an average of 37·4 per cent. more than the retail prices index. This contrasts vividly with the new system under which the national non-domestic rating multiplier cannot rise by more than the rate of inflation.

Bathing Waters

36. **Mr. Sillars:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will provide the latest figures which are available on the compliance of bathing waters with the European Community bathing water standards.

Mr. Trippier: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for Angus, East (Mr. Welsh).

Mr. Pawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress has been made in improving the quality of bathing waters, and when he expects all bathing waters to meet the standards in the EC bathing water directive.

Mr. Chris Patten: Provisional results for the survey carried out during the 1990 bathing season showed that 77 per cent. of the 446 identified bathing waters in the United Kingdom met the mandatory coliform bacteria standards of the EC bathing water directive. This compares with 76 per cent. of the 440 identified bathing waters in 1989.

Although this maintains the steady improvement of recent years, I believe that more urgent action is required

to bring all our bathing waters up to the highest standards. Last March I announced that in future all substantial discharges of sewage to sea should be treated at a sewage treatment works. The estimated cost of this was £1·5 billion. I am now able to announce that following discussions with the water companies in England and Wales, they have agreed to provide additional treatment for around 40 improvement schemes at an estimated cost of about £600 million over the next five years. This is on top of the £1·4 billion bathing water compliance programme announced last year which the companies have also agreed to advance where possible.

This means that bathing waters will be improved sooner, and for many discharges the standard of treatment provided will be better than previously planned. Our aim is to complete the improvement programme for all bathing waters that presently fail to comply with EC standards by 1995, although present indications are that this may not be practicable for nine large schemes where there are major technical difficulties.

The 1990 results for the United Kingdom are set out in summary form. I shall arrange for a more detailed summary of the results to be placed in the Library shortly, and we shall also be sending the results to the Commission of the European Communities.

Bathing Waters. Survey—1990 results for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
Compliance with bathing Water Directive (76/160/EEC): Coliform Standard

	Pass		*Fail*		*Total*	
England						
Northumbrian Region	21	(20)	12	(12)	32	(32)
Yorkshire Region	17	(18)	5	(4)	22	(22)
Anglian Region	27	(23)	2	(5)	29	(28)
Thames Region	3	(3)	0	(0)	3	(3)
Southern Region	48	(45)	18	(20)	66	(65)
Wessex Region	39	(31)	0	(7)	39	(38)
South West Region	118	(113)	15	(19)	133	(132)
North West Region	10	(11)	23	(22)	33	(33)
Wales	35	(40)	15	(8)	50	(48)
Scotland	12	(16)	11	(7)	23	(23)
Northern Ireland	15	(16)	1	(0)	16	(16)
Totals	345	(336)	101	(104)	446	(440)

Results for 1989 are in brackets.

Housing Associations

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) what percentage of housing association new build comes from off-the-shelf programmes;

(2) what percentage of housing association new build is shown to be to mobility standard as a result of the scheme audit;

(3) what percentage of housing association new build comes from rehabilitation programmes.

Mr. Michael Spicer: These are matters for the Housing Corporation. I have therefore asked the chairman of the corporation to respond to my hon. Friend direct.

Air Pollution

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations and information he has had and from whom, concerning implications of the moving of the east London air quality monitoring station 2 km to the north-west for the accuracy of monitoring of air pollution; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: My right hon. Friend has received no such representations. The Department has no responsibility for the east London air quality monitoring station in question.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will update the figures in his answer of 26 July, *Official Report*, columns *381-82*, for all of 1990 so far; and if he will list the dates, number of hours over 60 ppb, and maximum levels, from the ozone monitoring network covering the London area.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The dates, number of hours over 60 ppb and the maximum levels of ozone in ppb measured at the Department of the Environment monitoring sites in the London area so far during 1990 are as follows:

Date	*Number of hours over 60 ppb*	*Maximum hourly mean, ppb*
Central London Laboratory, Minster House, Victoria		
May 5	6	88
6	6	79
June 17	4	67
July 8	4	69
15	1	64
18	2	61
20	3	79
21	7	96
August 1	3	69
3	3	74
4	5	83
Bridge Place, Victoria		
July 15	1	64
18	2	61
20	3	79
21	7	96
August 1	4	82
3	3	90
4	9	108
24	2	68
25	6	79
Stevenage, Hertfordshire		
April 1	1	63
June 17	4	82
29	2	64
July 15	11	100
18	1	63
19	6	101
20	9	110
21	13	126
August 1	7	89

Date	Number of hours over 60 ppb	Maximum hourly mean, ppb
2	8	118
3	12	136
4	8	90
24	4	75
26	5	81
29	1	63
Harwell, Oxfordshire		
April 29	4	71
30	5	85
May 3	4	90
4	6	85
5	9	100
6	6	81
28	3	67
June 16	4	70
17	9	71
July 15	10	89
17	9	79
18	7	82
19	7	83
20	9	84
21	13	132
25	5	78
26	2	63
27	1	67
August 1	7	81
2	11	106
3	18	113
4	10	89
24	5	76
25	7	68
28	4	67
29	5	69

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when his Department was notified that the BBC was prepared to use air quality information supplied by his Department; when the service was arranged to start; why the supply of information was withdrawn; when his Department notified the BBC of the need for a press conference about air quality; when the press conference took place; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The arrangements for the new public air quality information system were made with the Meteorological Office. It already supplies weather information to the media, and advised that there would be a demand for air quality data supplied at the same time. The service was launched by my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Mr. Trippier) at a press conference on 24 October. I am not aware of any break in availability of data from the Meteorological Office. The prominence given by the media to the information at any particular time will, of course, depend on the pollution levels reported.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what advice he has given to people to protect themselves from increased susceptibilities to infection and disease resulting from high levels of ozone.

Mr. Dorrell: I have been asked to reply.

The Department of Health has established an advisory group on the medical aspects of air pollution episodes. This group will consider what advice, if any, should be given by central Government about personal protection measures when levels of air pollution are high. It will give guidance on to whom this advice should be addressed, and what criteria should be adopted for issuing it.

A "Layman's Guide to Ozone" was issued in 1989 by the Department of the Environment with input on health aspects from the Department of Health. A copy is available in the Library.

Ivory

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is Her Majesty's Government's policy on the lifting, in any respect, of the current ivory ban; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The Government remain firmly committed to maintaining the ivory trade ban for as long as it is necessary to ensure the survival and recovery of elephant populations. The CITES convention provides for species to be removed from appendix I when no longer endangered, but the Government have no plans to initiate proposals for such a reclassification.

Pollution

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will make a statement on the progress made to date on implementing the provisions of the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989; what regulations have been laid; and what regulations he expects to lay arising from the Act.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: The regulations necessary to implement the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989 are now being finalised with a view to their being issued for consultation before the Christmas recess. The proposed regulations will:

(a) require each waste regulation authority to establish and maintain a register of carriers of controlled waste;
(b) set out the manner in which the registration system is to operate; and
(c) set out the steps which a regulation authority must take before applying for a warrant to seize a vehicle which it believes has been used in the illegal disposal of waste (fly-tipping).

A separate commencement order will be made to bring the 1989 Act into force.

Home Repossessions

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish in the *Official Report* his letter in response to the written question from the hon. Member for Barnsley, East (Mr. Patchett), *Official Report*, 1 November, column *694*, on home repossessions.

Mr. Key: The text of the reply sent on 12 November was as follows:

"I was unable to provide an answer to your question about mortgage possessions before the Recess and in my reply of 1 November I said I would write.

The available information on the number of properties taken into possession is based on statistics provided by the largest building societies (and Abbey National). These figures are published every six months by the Council of Mortgage Lenders and a copy of their latest press release is enclosed, with the figures you require at Table 1. I understand that the CML is planning to extend the coverage of these statistics to other mortgage lenders, including banks, insurance companies and finance houses.

Local authorities have also provided limited mortgage lending where buyers have found it difficult to obtain funds from elsewhere. The scale of such lending is now very small. The information provided by English local authorities on properties taken into possession in the financial years 1978-79 to 1989-90 is given in the attached table."

Copies of the documents referred to are in the Library.

Environment Statistics

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will set out Her Majesty's Government's reservations expressed in regard to the European Commission proposal to the Council on COM (90) 319 final on the gathering of regular official statistics on the environment.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* The Government support in principle the Commission's proposal to establish a formal programme for the regular collection of official statistics on the environment to inform Community environmental policy. There are a number of important areas which the Government wish to clarify in refining the details of the proposal. These include:

(a) The relationship between this proposed programme to be implemented by the Statistical Office of the European Communities, that of the European environment agency when operational, and those of other international organisations such as the OECD, needs thorough examination in order to avoid duplication of effort.

(b) Member states should be given a greater management role in shaping the scope and direction of the programme.

(c) A clearer distinction should be made between information that could be gathered in the short term and aims for more comprehensive data gathering in the longer term.

(d) Proposals for any new surveys or extensions to existing surveys need a clear assessment of the costs, benefits and the possible burdens on industry.

Residential Development

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment on how many occasions in each of the last five years he has permitted residential development which took the total dwellings for a sub-plan area beyond his own recommendations.

Mr. Atkins *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* This information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Figures for housing provision in development plans will carry weight as material considerations in the determination of planning applications and appeals, but they are not necessarily overriding. Each case has to be decided on its particular merits, and all relevant material considerations must by statute be taken into account.

Homelessness, Newham

Mr. Tony Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the number of people on the homelessness register in the London borough of Newham in each year since 1980.

Mr. Michael Spicer *[holding answer 13 November 1990]:* Local authorities report the number of households accepted and found accommodation under the homelessness provisions of the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977 and the Housing Act 1985.

Available figures from Newham's housing investment programme returns are:

	Households
1980-81	n/a
1981-82	568
1982-83	720
1983-84	660
1984-85	1,263
1985-86	898
1986-87	1,511
1987-88	1,566
1988-89	637
1989-90	1,039

Airport Companies

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what contribution has been made from the surplus at local authority-controlled or influenced airport companies to the provision and funding of local services; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. McLoughlin: I have been asked to reply.

The 15 public airport companies publish annual reports and accounts in accordance with the Companies Act. These record the following dividends as having been paid to the shareholder local authorities for 1989-90:

	£ million
Birmingham	1·6
Bournemouth	0·2
Bristol	0·6
Cardiff	0·2
Luton	0·2
Manchester	8·5
Newcastle	2·0
Norwich	0·3

SCOTLAND

Cleveland Fuels Ltd.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take account of the draft European Community directives on the incineration of hazardous wastes when considering the current application by Cleveland Fuels Ltd. for a licence for the incineration of waste residues at Renfrew.

Mr. Rifkind: I understand that the draft directive on the incineration of hazardous wastes is at an early stage in its preparation. I shall however take note of the current proposals when considering the application by Cleveland Fuels Ltd. for registration as an incineration works.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will consider prevailing levels of atmospheric pollution locally when considering the application by Cleveland Fuels Ltd. for a certificate of registration for the incineration of waste residues at Renfrew.

Mr. Rifkind: I understand from Glasgow district council that recent measurements of sulphur ioxide in parts of its district, close to the site of the incinerator proposed by Cleveland Fuels Ltd., show average levels appreciably higher than would be expected from data currently available from the national survey of smoke and sulphur dioxide. I shall consider this point further when setting limits on the discharge of sulphur dioxide from the proposed plant.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, when he considers the application by Cleveland Fuels

Ltd. for a certificate of registration for the incineration of waste residues at Renfrew, he will take account of the formulation used for the pollution assessment contained within the application.

Mr. Rifkind: Two different approaches, both of which gave acceptable results, were used by Cleveland Fuels Ltd. to assess the environmental impact of its emissions.

Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate will however carry out its own assessments before determining the appropriate content of the certificate of registration for the company.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, when considering the application by Cleveland Fuels Ltd. for a certificate of registration for the incineration of waste residues at Renfrew, he has taken account of *(a)* the nature of the feedstock and *(b)* the description of the nature of the feedstock provided in the application.

Mr. Rifkind: Cleveland Fuels Ltd. has provided a generic description of the fuel it intends to use, specified primarily by maximum pollutant content and to a lesser extent by source. In assessing its application for registration I will not only take account of this description but also give consideration to such other likely characteristics of the waste as may give rise to nuisance. The company will be required to provide such equipment and to carry out such tests as are necessary to minimise their impact on the local environment.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if, when considering the application by Cleveland Fuels Ltd. for a certificate of registration for the incineration of waste residues at Renfrew, he will take any steps to force the company to fulfil the undertaking given in the application that it would operate an open door policy.

Mr. Rifkind: I have been assured by the company that it wishes to be as open as possible with the local population and to discuss with them any difficulties occasioned by the operation of the plant. If the proposal proceeds, Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate will actively encourage the development of good working relationships between the company and its neighbours.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will give a breakdown of the representations he received in connection with Cleveland Fuels Ltd.'s application for a licence including *(a)* the names of those organisations and individuals making representations and *(b)* how many supported and how many opposed the proposed development.

Mr. Rifkind: Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate has received nine representations directly, one of which included a petition, as a result of the public advertisement by Cleveland Fuels Ltd. of its application for registration as an incineration works. There has also been one letter from a Member of Parliament about the application. All were opposed to the development.

Respondents were not however advised that their names and affiliations may be made public. I must honour the implied confidentiality and cannot therefore list them as requested.

Forth Valley Health Board

Mr. Galbraith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will ask Mr. A. R. Robertson, general manager, Forth Valley health board, to reply to the letter of 17 September from the hon. Member for Strathkelvin and Bearsden.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: This is a matter for Forth Valley health board but I have asked officials to draw the hon. Member's question to the attention of the board.

Waste Incinerators

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the applications in *(a)* the last 12 months and *(b)* currently under consideration for the siting of waste incinerators in Scotland and the company requesting the operating licence in each case.

Mr. Rifkind: Her Majesty's pollution inspectorate has received the following applications for registration as waste incinerators:

Isola Werke, UK Ltd., Cumbernauld—tail gas incinerator;

Lothian Chemical Co., Edinburgh—tail gas and waste materials incinerator;

Cleveland Fuels Ltd., Renfrew—waste materials incinerator.

Besides these, all of which are still under consideration, the deemed registrations as a result of changes to the statutory position contained within the Control of Air Pollution (Registration of Works) Regulations 1989 for the following incinerators have still to be determined:

(a) Local Authority Municipal Incinerators
East Tullos, Aberdeen District Council
Alloa, Clackmannan District Council
Baldovie, Dundee District Council
Linwood, Renfrew District Council
St. Ola, Orkney District Council
Roma Head, Shetland District Council

(b) Industrial Waste Incinerator
Lanstar (Scotland) Ltd., Ardersier.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications for licences for waste incinerators in Scotland have been received in the last 10 years from *(a)* Caird Development Ltd., *(b)* Cleveland Fuels Ltd. and *(c)* any other subsidiary of Caird Development.

Mr. Rifkind: Only Cleveland Fuels Ltd. has applied for the registration of a waste incinerator.

Mr. Dewar: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many complaints were received by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution in connection with incinerators operated by Caird Development or its subsidiaries in the last five years.

Mr. Rifkind: Caird Development or its subsidiaries have not operated any incinerators in Scotland over the last five years. Her Majesty's industrial pollution inspectorate therefore has no record of complaint.

The company's operations in England and Wales are inspected by Her Majesty's inspectorate of pollution and questions related to the company's operations there should be addressed to the relevant Secretaries of State.

Police Arrests

Ms. Gordon: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to what extent, and in what form, information on the number of arrests by police *(a)* by force and *(b)* nationally is maintained.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Information on the number of arrests by police is not held centrally in Scotland. Within police forces records of arrests are kept at the station of detention or relevant divisional office.

Heart Attacks

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients within the Greater Glasgow health board area have suffered heart attacks while awaiting coronary angiography during the last 12 months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Information on the number of patients who suffer heart attacks is not recorded.

Nurses (Grading Appeals)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on current progress being made in each health board in Scotland on nurses' clinical grading appeals.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: I understand that at the end of September, eight out of 15 health boards had completed the appeals currently before them. The rest have undertaken to complete their appeal hearings by the end of March 1991.

Health Councils

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement about the direct representation of patients, medical and paramedical staff and community interests in local health councils.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Under the terms of the NHS (Scotland) Act 1978, as amended, members of local health councils are appointed under the provisions of schemes prepared by health boards and approved by the Secretary of State.

British Rail

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when he will discuss with the British Railways Board the proposals for the future of Speedlink services discussed by the board at its meeting on 1 November.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: British Rail will submit the conclusions of its review of Speedlink services to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport. My right hon. and learned Friend will consider the implications for Scotland of any action which is proposed.

Rents-to-mortgages Scheme

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if his Department has considered the numbers of completions and applications achieved under the rents-to-mortgages scheme in its first year as against the target set by Scottish Homes; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The pilot rents-to-mortgages scheme was introduced in October 1989 and has been monitored carefully by Scottish Homes and the Scottish Development Department. At end October 1990 over 1,400 inquiries had been received and 82 sales had been completed, with a further 100 applications in the pipeline. I expect that over 200 sales will have been completed by March 1991.

This position is comparable with the early stages of the right-to-buy scheme. In 1979 under the voluntary arrangements then operating the Scottish Special Housing Association sold only 10 houses to sitting tenants but by 1980 there were more than 1,400 sales. We expect the rents-to-mortgages take-up also to show a marked increase in future.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland on what grounds it is proposed to exclude from participation in the rents-to-mortgages scheme council tenants in receipt of housing benefit.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Home ownership carries with it substantial responsibilities and it would be wrong to encourage tenants to take on financial commitments under the pilot rents-to-mortgages scheme which they then may be unable to meet properly.

Bathing Water Quality

Sir Hector Monro: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will announce the results of the 1990 survey of bathing water quality; and if he will make a statement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The results of the monitoring carried out by river purification boards this year showed that 12 of the 23 identified Scottish waters met the mandatory standards for coliform bacteria set by the EC bathing water directive. This compares with 16 in 1989 and 12 in 1988. While it is disapppointing that last year's apparent improvement has not been sustained, the better weather in 1989 was, as I indicated in my announcement on 25 January this year, likely to have been a factor in the better 1989 results.

Real and lasting improvements depend on the completion of the capital works programme now in hand with increased financial provision to achieve compliance as soon as possible. The provision for water and sewerage services in Scotland now amounts to more than £500 million over the three-year period 1990-93. As a further positive measure to assist in accelerating progress I am, as previously announced and subject to parliamentary approval, making available to sewerage authorities in Scotland up to £130 million in grants over the next three years for projects which bring environmental benefits, including bathing water improvements.

A full report of the 1990 results, including details of the action now being taken to secure the compliance of individual bathing waters, has been placed in the Library and the results are also being made known to the Commission of the European Communities.

The 1990 results are set out in the table.

	Result
Nairn (East Beach)	Fail
Cullen	Pass
Fraserburgh	Pass
Aberdeen	Pass
Montrose	Pass

	Result
Arbroath	Fail
Carnoustie	Pass
St. Andrews (West Sands)	Pass
Kinghorn (Pettycur)	Pass
Aberdour (Silversands)	Fail
Gullane	Pass
North Berwick (Milsey Bay)	Pass
Yellowcraigs	Fail
Dunbar (Belhaven)	Pass
Pease Bay	Pass
Sandyhills	Fail
Girvan	Fail
Turnberry	Fail
Ayr (South Beach)	Fail
Prestwick	Fail
Troon (South Beach)	Pass
Irvine-Gailes (New Town)	Fail
Saltcoats/Ardrossan (South Beach)	Fail

Child Care, Fife

Mr. McLeish: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the award to Professor Mapstone, the adviser to the inquiry into child care policy in Fife, of a Government grant in her role as director of the centre for child care and protection studies to examine the relationship between local authorities and the children's hearing system.

Mr. Michael Forsyth *[holding answer 13 November 1990]:* Professor Mapstone was awarded a research grant for a project as a result of a process of competitive tendering. The research is concerned with an examination of the factors that promote the development of an integrated child care strategy linking residential and non-residential resources. There is no conflict between her research work and her activities as adviser to the Fife inquiry under the chairmanship of Sheriff Kearney.

EMPLOYMENT

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will place in the Library a copy of the policy guidelines of his Department in relation to the use of the Welsh language in Wales on matters relating to his Training Agency.

Mr. Jackson: A copy of the Welsh language policy requested by the hon. Gentleman will be forwarded to the Library. It should be noted that the guidance will come into effect in March 1991.

YTS Accidents

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if he will list by year since its inception to date for the Yorkshire and Humberside region *(a)* the accident and *(b)* fatality figures for people on YTS training.

Mr. Jackson: The table gives the number of fatal, major and minor reportable accidents to YTS trainees in Yorkshire and Humberside region from 1 April 1983 to 30 September 1990.

Dates	Fatal	Major	Minor
April 1983 to March 1984	—	11	88
April 1984 to March 1985	—	14	157
April 1985 to March 1986	—	27	209
April 1986 to March 1987	1	38	205
April 1987 to March 1988	—	75	401
April 1988 to March 1989	1	86	390
April 1989 to March 1990	—	67	365
April 1990 to September 1990	—	47	[1]213

[1] Three quarters only.

Notes:

(a) Training Agency figures are compiled on a similar basis to those prepared by the Health and Safety Executive on employed people. However, the Training Agency's figures will include a number of accidents to trainees in education establishments and road traffic accidents which may not have been reportable to the Health and Safety Executive had the individuals been employed.

(b) Major injuries are classified according to the severity criteria laid down in the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1985.

Young People (Employment)

Mr. Ted Garrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what steps have been taken to improve the employment prospects of young people in north Tyneside.

Mr. Jackson: Youth training enables young people to acquire the higher levels of skills and qualifications for which employers are looking. An offer of a suitable place on youth training is guaranteed to all young people under 18 who are not in full-time education or a job.

The Tyneside training and enterprise council will have the resources and the flexibility to address the employment and training needs of young people in its area.

Claimants (Tests)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what representations he has received concerning the actively seeking work tests and associated forms which have to be completed by claimants; and if he will take action in order to simplify such forms.

Mr. Jackson: I have not had any representations concerning the actively seeking work tests and associated forms. The matter of reviewing the forms falls within the responsibility of the Employment Service executive agency. I have therefore referred this issue to Mr. Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, for reply.

Social Security Act 1989

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) what additional cost to his Department has been incurred in order to implement the Social Security Act 1989;

(2) in which languages forms associated with enforcing the Social Security Act 1989 are available; whether all unemployment benefit offices hold stocks of such forms; and whether resources will be made available for trained interpreters to assist members of ethnic minority groups in actively seeking work interviews;

(3) what provisions he has made for the illiterate within budgets for the implementation of the Social Security Act 1989.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Action Credit Schemes

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment (1) if claimants in designated pilot areas for action credit schemes who do not wish to participate will be subject to any restriction of benefits or any other discriminatory sanction; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if his Department will publish in full the market research conducted into the action credit scheme in the west of Scotland; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment if his Department will publish in full upon completion its evaluation of existing action credit schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Jackson: Any decisions relating to publication of the evaluation report of the action credit pilot scheme will be made after the report has been completed. This will not be before the end of November.

Availability for Work Test

Mr. Nellist: To ask the Secretary of State for Employment what information he has as to the number of claimants in Coventry who have had their benefit suspended or ended in each month since the introduction of revised procedures for testing availability for work in November 1986.

Mr. Jackson: Questions on operational matters in the Employment Service executive agency are the responsibility of Mike Fogden, the agency's chief executive, to whom I have referred this question for reply.

HEALTH

Elderly People

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has, or representations he has received, alleging that some elderly people who cannot bath themselves are falling through a gap between their health authority district nursing service and their local authority social services; if he will issue guidelines stating which authority is responsible for running the service; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will make available funding to ensure that health authorities can provide weekly bathing services for all elderly people; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: We have received a copy of the Age Concern report on "Bathing Services for Elderly People in London". Our response to the report is under consideration. It is for local health and social services authorities in England to co-ordinate services, including bathing services, locally. It is also for them to decide within the overall resources available what is to be spent on these services. Our general guidance on community care management, to be issued shortly, will encourage and assist health and social services authorities to co-operate in the provision of care services for the elderly.

Nursing Homes (Drugs)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from local authorities and other organisations concerning the administration of drugs in nursing homes.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: None. Health authorities are responsible for ensuring that nursing homes make adequate arrangements for the recording, safekeeping, handling and disposal of drugs.

Residential Homes (Medicines)

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to update the memorandum of guidance issued by the Department of Health and Social Security in 1977, concerning the custody, administration and disposal of medicines in residential homes;

(2) what response he has made to the National Union of Public Employees' document "Administration of Drugs in Residential Homes".

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The memorandum of guidance on the arrangements for health care in residential homes for elderly people, including the section on the custody, administration and disposal of medicines, is currently being revised.

The National Union of Public Employees' document "Administration of Drugs in Residential Homes" will be considered in the revision of the memorandum.

Hepatitis

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission an investigation into the recent outbreaks of hepatitis A in Liverpool schools.

Mr. Dorrell: The public health laboratory service communicable disease surveillance centre regularly reports on outbreaks of hepatitis A virus in its communicable disease report (CDR). A recent CDR gave information on a number of family and school outbreaks, including those from the Mersey region, and I understand the centre is investigating the outbreaks fully. Consultants in communicable disease control in Mersey are aware of the problems and have advised appropriate control measures.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases of jaundice have been recorded in Liverpool schools in the last two years;

(2) how many cases of hepatitis A have been recorded in Liverpool health authority schools in the past two years.

Mr. Dorrell: We do not hold this information centrally. The hon. Member may wish to contact Mr. J. B. Fitzpatrick, the chairman of Liverpool health authority, for details.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice is given to teaching staff, cleaning staff and parents at schools where there is an outbreak of hepatitis A.

Mr. Dorrell: It is the responsibility of the directors of public health and environmental health officers jointly to provide advice and guidance, in consultation with community paediatricians or senior community medical officers responsible for community schools health services.

In 1977 advice was issued by the Department of Health and Social Security in the memorandum "Control of Communicable Disease in Schools" which was addressed to individual health authorities and to specialists in community medicine (child health) for them to provide guidance to local education authorities, schools and teachers.

Advice on hepatitis A is also contained in the latest edition of the handbook "Immunisation Against Infectious Disease" which was issued to all doctors in May 1990. Copies are available in the Library.

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action has been taken to end the outbreak of hepatitis A in Liverpool schools; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Letters were sent to all general practitioners in Liverpool from the consultant in communicable disease control on 15 January and 24 October suggesting the best medical practice to control hepatitis A. The letters advised general practitioners to exclude all patients from school or work for seven days after onset of jaundice or until clinical recovery.

Preventive Health Care (Schools)

Mr. Alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on preventive health care in primary and junior schools;

(2) what guidelines his Department gives to local education authorities on routine medical inspections of pupils in primary and junior schools.

Mr. Dorrell: The paper "Prevention in the Child Health Services"—a copy is available in the Library—issued by the Department of Health and Social Security in 1980 asked health authorities, in consultation with local education authorities, to devise programmes for health prevention and promotion in schools designed to meet the circumstances and needs of the local community.

The paper advised that all children should have a comprehensive medical assessment during the first year of compulsory schooling. It suggested that, with the improvements in the detection of handicapping conditions, routine medical examinations should not be necessary thereafter. Instead health surveillance should be based on serial screening of vision, hearing and growth by school nurses supported as necessary by a doctor who, at any age in infancy or childhood, should be prepared to investigate health problems reported by the nurses, teachers or parents.

We are currently considering whether there is a need for further central guidance on the management of school health services.

AIDS

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total expenditure by Her Majesty's Government upon the health education programme relating to AIDS in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what is the total expenditure estimated to be in the current financial year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The table shows spending since 1985-86 by the Department of Health and the Health Education Authority (HEA) on the development of the national AIDS public education campaign, including the running costs of the national AIDS helpline and related telephone information and advice services. The HEA assumed responsibility for the further development of the campaign in October 1987. The HEA has built on the success the campaign has achieved in raising levels of public awareness and knowledge of the risks of HIV infection. The HEA plans to launch the next phase of the mass media campaign in early December. This will focus on increasing individual perception of the risks of HIV transmission. Not shown in the table are the sums spent by other interested Government Departments on HIV prevention work.

The table also sets out total allocations to regional health authorities, local authorities and to the voluntary sector as a contribution towards the development of HIV and AIDS-related services, including the development of local HIV prevention initiatives. We have also asked each district to appoint an HIV prevention co-ordinator to spearhead this important aspect of authorities' remit and draw together the work of agencies in the statutory and voluntary sectors.

£ million

	Regional health authorities	*Local authorities*	*Voluntary sector*	*Department of Health*	*HEA*
1985-86	—	—	0·10	0·52	—
1986-87	—	—	0·16	7·60	—
1987-88	25·1	—	1·30	6·74	4·47
1988-89	61·7	—	1·09	—	10·00
1989-90	122·8	7·0	1·60	—	12·00
1990-91	127·5	9·8	1·80	—	10·00

We are fully committed to taking effective action to curb the spread of HIV infection in all sections of the United Kingdom population. In the absence of either a vaccine against HIV infection or a cure for AIDS education and prevention remain the cornerstones of our strategy. The priority that we attach to this is demonstrated by the fact that we continue to spend more on AIDS health education than on any other single health education programme.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has concerning the total funding from Government sources made available to research into AIDS in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what is the total such expenditure estimated to be in the current financial year.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Finance made available by Government Departments for AIDS research since 1985-86 was:

	£ million
1985-86	0·667
1986-87	2·460
1987-88	9·834
1988-89	11·924
1989-90	16·835

A total of £20 million has been made available for 1990-91 for AIDS research.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funds have been given by his Department to the Terrence Higgins Trust since such public funding began.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The Department has awarded the Terrence Higgins Trust section 64 grants as follows:

	£ thousand
1985-86	35·5
1986-87	118·6
1987-88	300·0
1988-89	400·0
1989-90	450·0
1990-91	450·0

Heart Disease

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what has been the total expenditure by Her Majesty's Government upon the health education programme relating to heart disease in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what is the total expenditure estimated to be in the current financial year.

Mr. Dorrell: The health education programme relating to heart disease in England is the "Look After Your Heart" programme, run jointly by the Department of Health and Health Education Authority. Launched in April 1987, total expenditure on the programme is as follows:

	£
1986-87	465,000
1987-88	2·5 million
1988-89	4·55 million
1989-90	4·4 million
1990-91	[1]4·907 million

[1] Estimated.

The figures do not take into account funds for associated life style work, such as activity on smoking, cancer preventions, nutrition and so on.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has concerning the total funding from Government sources made available to research into heart disease in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what the total such expenditure is estimated to be in the current financial year.

Mr. Dorrell: The Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its grant in aid from the Department of Education and Science, is the main agency through which the Government support biomedical and clinical research in the United Kingdom. During the period 1985-86 to 1989-90, the MRC spent £24·3 million on research into cardiovascular disease as follows:

	£ million
1985-86	4·6
1986-87	4·3
1987-88	4·6
1988-89	5·3
1989-90	5·5

An estimate for the current financial year, 1990-91, is not available.

In addition, the Department directly funded some £0·25 million of research into heart disease and related conditions in 1989-90 and plans to spend a similar sum in 1990-91. Information on research in previous years is available in the Department of Health's yearbook of research and development, copies of which are available in the Library. Information on research into cardiovascular disease funded by other agencies is not collected centrally.

Defective X-ray Equipment

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the successful prosecution by the Health and Safety Executive at Oxford Crown court of Medical X-Ray Supplies, Kingsbury, north London, for supply of a defective machine which subjected patients to excessive radiation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: On 22 October 1990 Medical X-Ray Supplies Ltd. was prosecuted by the Health and Safety Executive and fined a total of £6,000 at Oxford Crown court for its failure to carry out a critical examination of breast screening X-ray equipment supplied to a private health screening company and installed in a mobile health screening unit between January 1988 and May 1989.

Although the radiation dosages given by the defective machine were greater than normal for that machine, the additional dosage was comparatively small and risks to the health of the women concerned were minimal.

Self-governing Trusts

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the recommendations that he receives from the regional health authority in respect of each application for self-governing trust status.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. This is a management exercise and is confidential.

Kidney Treatment

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department has plans for provision of renal dialysis machinery and centres and appointment of consultant nephrologists to meet the projected increase in demand within the next 10 years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The planning and provision of renal services and the appointment of consultants is a matter for health authorities to decide, taking into account local needs and priorities.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Disabled People

Mr. Hannam: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what action he plans to take following the recommendation made by the Social Services Committee

in its ninth report, "Community Care: Social Security for Disabled People" that the independent living fund be provided with additional resources specifically to collect information about characteristics of application, to and awards from the fund;

(2) what action he plans to take following the recommendation contained in the Social Services Committee's ninth report "Community Care: Social Security for Disabled People" that the Government conduct and publish on-going research on the actual and potential costs of disability in conjunction with organisations representing disabled people;

(3) what action he plans to take following the recommendation made by the Social Services Committee in its ninth report "Community Care: Social Security for Disabled People" that the Government publish details of work on models using a points system as the basis of a comprehensive disability income so that the problems identified by these models may be examined by other interested groups.

Mr. Scott: We are in the process of examining and considering the contents of the report and we will be publishing our response in due course.

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he has received a copy of the Disablement Income Group's report "Short Changed by Disability"; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Scott: We have received a copy of the DIG report and considered it carefully. DIG does not itself claim that the results of its survey of only 87 disabled people are a fair representation of the needs of all disabled people. In drawing up our proposals for the reform of disability benefits, we have had the benefit both of the OPCS surveys of disability which had a sample of 10,000 people and a follow-up survey based on the family expenditure survey.

Disability Employment Credit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will publish the details of the process of consultation engaged in by his Department prior to the introduction of the proposed disability employment credit;

(2) what plans he has to engage in consultation with organisations representing people with disabilities on the proposals for a disability employment credit.

Mr. Scott: When we published "The Way Ahead: Benefits for Disabled People", comments were invited from many representative organisations; and on 5 April I held a meeting with the Disability Benefits Consortium. Careful consideration was given to the comments we received.

On 12 November, we published a note which sets out the provisions of the new benefit, which, following research and discussion, we have decided to call disability working allowance. Copies of this document have been sent to 120 organisations, including those which commented on the disability living allowance document "Disability Allowance: Assessment and Adjudication".

Benefits System

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what research his Department is currently undertaking into the effects on different client groups of the current benefits system.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Research currently being undertaken or commissioned by the Department into the effects on different client groups of the current benefit systems is set out in the table. In addition to these projects, research into invalid care allowance, lone parents, maternity rights and personal pension optants has recently been completed.

Client group	*Title of research*
The unemployed	1. Effects of the "Actively Seeking Work" provisions
	2. Survey of Incomes In and Out of work[1]
Young people	The effect of severe hardship payments for 16 and 17 year olds
Pensioners	Survey of retirement and retirement plans
All	1. Methods of payment of benefit
	2. The operation of the Social Fund

[1] This is a large project comprising a number of individual studies.

Social Fund

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will provide statistics showing total numbers of social fund refusals for grants and loans and total numbers of social fund refusals for grants and loans due to insufficient priority, for each local social security office in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Scott: The information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Local Office, Glasgow

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will detail options currently under consideration by his Department in relation to the site, catchment area and projected opening date of the planned Glasgow, Pollok local office; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The new Glasgow (Pollok) office would cover the present catchment areas of the offices in Muirhouse street and Paisley road west. The opening date of the new office will depend on the site chosen and the availability of funds. Meanwhile, a plan covering service proposals is being drawn up, which will be subject to local consultation.

Departmental Accounts

Mr. Dunnachie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if his Department has considered the queries raised by the Comptroller and Auditor General concerning its annual accounts for 1989-90; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have, of course, given careful consideration to the Comptroller and Auditor General's comments, and action has been taken to improve the Department's accounting performance.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 15 November 1990

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Birmingham Pub Bombings

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Attorney-General when he expects the Devon and Cornwall police to complete their investigations into the Birmingham pub bombings case; and if he will make a statement.

The Attorney-General: I understand that police inquiries are far advanced and continue to be conducted with maximum speed consistent with thoroughness.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mr. Jonathan Moyle

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further information he has about the death of Mr. Jonathan Moyle in Chile; and if he will make a statement as to the cause and nature of his death.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no further information. The investigation by the Chilean authorities into the tragic death of Mr. Jonathan Moyle is still in progress. The inquest opened by Her Majesty's coroner for Exeter and East Devon has been adjourned until 31 January 1991. We cannot anticipate the outcome of either inquiry.

Afghanistan

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will now reopen the British embassy in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We have no plans at present to reopen our embassy in Kabul.

Professor Kazem Rajavi

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Swiss Government concerning the circumstances of, and investigation into, the assassination of Professor Kazem Rajavi.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This is a matter for the Swiss authorities which are continuing their investigations.

TRANSPORT

London Underground

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will pay an official visit to London Underground stations during the rush hour.

Mr. Freeman: Both my right hon. Friend and I visit the underground regularly, during the rush hour and at other times.

M62

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what investigations he has initiated *(a)* into the possibility of reducing freight traffic on the M62 by transferring a proportion of such to the railways and *(b)* into improving the rail network to facilitate the carriage of more goods.

Mr. Freeman: The practical opportunities for transferring goods to rail from the M62, as with all roads, are likely to be very limited. We are encouraging BR to build on its strengths in the freight market which are primarily for trainload movements. Where there are sound commercial prospects we are backing new investment.

Trans-Pennine Study

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to have the results of the trans-Pennine study currently being undertaken by consultants on his behalf, and when he expects to publish the findings.

Mr. Chope: The consultants' report is due next spring. We shall make an announcement after assessing its findings and recommendations.

"This Common Inheritance"

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how the policies set out in the Government's White Paper "This Common Inheritance" will affect his Department's national road traffic forecasts and the appraisal of trunk road schemes.

Mr. Parkinson: The national road traffic forecasts published in 1989 provide a broad range of future levels of road traffic demand, which remains the best available view. The forecasts clearly might be affected by future changes in, for example, regulations or taxation; but there is no reason to change them at this stage, since they are broad enough to cover the general effect of the policies in "This Common Inheritance". The forecasts do not represent a target. The Government's policy is not to meet all demand in all circumstances, but only where to do so is justified, taking into account economic and environmental considerations.

The recent meeting of the second world climate conference discussed the need for countries to control their emissions of greenhouse gases. "This Common Inheritance" refers to the Government's willingness, if other countries take similar action, to set themselves the target of returning CO_2 emissions to 1990 levels by 2005. A number of changes are identified which could contribute to slowing the growth of CO_2 emissions in the transport sector. Many of these options would have no direct effect on the demand for travel, particularly changes in vehicle technology, individual choice of vehicles, and driving behaviour. The uncertainties surrounding the target, and the way in which any target might be achieved, are therefore so great that there is no sound basis for changing forecasts of travel demand.

The Department will therefore continue to use the 1989 NRTF as the basis for the local forecasts used in appraising trunk road improvements. Where a local

authority has firm plans for actions to influence travel needs and choice, these plans will be taken into account directly in the preparation of the local traffic forecasts for the appraisal of a particular road improvement. (The local forecasts are based on NRTF, but also take account of local factors, such as car ownership, population and employment, and local authority plans.) The NRTF will be kept under review, in the light of actual experience of traffic growth and other changes.

M1 (Chemicals Spillage)

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the chemicals involved in the accident that resulted in the closure of the M1 on Tuesday 23 October.

Mr. Chope: The only chemical involved was hydrobromic acid solution.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether any signs were placed at motorway junctions to advise motorists joining the southbound carriageway that the M1 was closed at junction 11 during the aftermath of the accident on 23 October referred to in his answer of 30 October, *Official Report*, column *466;* whether any signs were placed on the hard shoulder or central reservations advising motorists to expect long delays; and whether any signs were placed at junctions, on the hard shoulder or central reservation advising motorists to leave the motorway before junction 11.

Mr. Chope: Remote signs to advise drivers of major incidents ahead are currently provided on our motorways only for major roadworks.

The primary source of information about unforeseen events is radio reports.

The Department is investigating means of improving driver information in such circumstances and I will write to my hon. Friend with more details.

Channel Tunnel

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether nuclear waste will be permitted to be carried through the channel tunnel.

Mr. Freeman: Eurotunnel has announced that it does not intend to permit the transport of nuclear waste through the tunnel.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Legal Firms

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those legal firms that have been criticised by his Department's inspectors since June 1979.

Mr. Redwood: Seven reports of inspectors appointed under the Companies Act and published since June 1979 have contained criticisms of firms of solicitors. The extent of criticism varies in degree and reference should be made to individual reports.

Name of company	*Date of publication of report*	*Name of firm*
Larkfold Holdings Limited	7 June 1979	Wright, Sons and Pepper
Darjeeling Holdings Limited	30 April 1980	Callingham Tucker
Scotia Investments Limited	22 January 1981	Richards Butler
Gilgate Holdings Limited	8 September 1981	Kidd, Rapinet, Badge & Co.
Milbury plc	27 October 1988	Hancock & Wills
County NatWest Limited	20 July 1989	Travers Smith and Braithwaite
County NatWest Securities Limited		
House of Fraser Holdings Limited	7 March 1990	Herbert Smith

Radio Scanners

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what regulations apply to the use in the United Kingdom of radio scanners; what are the main requirements of such regulations; whether he proposes to extend such regulations or to alter the requirements of existing regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Redwood: The use of radio scanners to listen to private messages is an offence under section 5(b) of the Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 if done otherwise than under the authority of the Secretary of State or in the course of duty as a servant of the Crown. The Broadcasting Act 1990 will amend the Wireless Telegraphy Act so that scanners may be ordered forfeit by the court under section 14 upon conviction. There are no other proposals to extend or alter section 5(b).

ENVIRONMENT

Heritage Properties

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what information he has on the number of heritage properties in public ownership which are open to view; and what incentives his Department makes available to private owners of properties to make their properties open to view.

Mr. Trippier: English Heritage owns, or manages on behalf of the Crown, over 400 historic properties, monuments and sites to which there is public access. The Historic Royal Palaces Agency has responsibility for six unoccupied royal palaces in London to which there is also public access. Both bodies are funded by the Department. In addition, a number of individual Government Departments and local authorities are responsible for other historic property, some of which is in use as office accommodation and to some of which there is public access. There is, however, no centrally held record of access arrangements to such properties.

This Department offers no direct incentives to private owners to open their properties to public view. However, private owners can be eligible for building repair grant from English Heritage provided there is provision for public access. In addition, Inland Revenue offers relief from certain capital taxes to encourage owners to keep and care for heritage property on condition that public access is provided.

Education Spending

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment (1) if he will list for each local education authority and for both the standard spending assessment element of *(a)* other education and *(b)* under-fives education the changes in these elements in both total sums and percentage caused by reducing the additional educational needs index from 70 to 50 per cent.;

(2) if he will list for each local education authority the results of changing the proportion of the standard spending assessment elements for *(a)* other education standard spending assessment and *(b)* under-fives standard spending assessment that are distributed on the basis of the additional educational needs index.

Mr. Key: I have today placed in the Library a table showing the effect on the provisional 1991-92 standard spending assessments for other education and for the under-fives of the proposed reduction in the proportion of these elements to be distributed on the basis of the additional educational needs (AEN) index from 70 per cent. to 50 per cent. The table shows the effects of the change in £s million and percentage terms for each local education authortity in England.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* the total standard spending assessment for education for each local education authority, *(b)* the standard spending assessment element for under-fives for each local education authority, *(c)* the standard spending assessment element for primary education for each local education authority, *(d)* the standard spending assessment element for secondary education for each local education authority, *(e)* the standard spending assessment element for post-16 education for each local education authority and *(f)* the standard spending assessment element for other education for each local education authority.

Mr. Key: I have today placed in the Library a table showing the information required.

Ms. Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will list *(a)* for each local education authority the adjustments to the indicator of student numbers within the post-16 education standard spending assessment in those areas expected to participate in the training credits pilot scheme for each local education authority involved and *(b)* the exemplification of changes in standard spending assessment for the post-16 education standard spending assessment for each local education authority involved.

Mr. Key: The figures requested are shown in the table:

Authority	*(a) Reduction in student numbers*	*(b) Reduction in post 16 education SSA element (£ million)*
Bexley	67	0·246
Bromley	36	0·134
Croydon	51	0·202
Birmingham	110	0·426
Bradford	109	0·403
Cheshire	97	0·322
Cornwall	160	0·559
Devon	297	1·017
Hertfordshire	230	0·820
Kent	123	0·433
Northumberland	77	0·260
Suffolk	178	0·602
Isles of Scilly	[1]—	[2]—

[1] Less than 1.
[2] Less than £1,000.

Metropolitan Water Board "B" Shares

Mr. French: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received about compensation due to Metropolitan Water Board "B" stockholders since 1958; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Two inquiries have been made on behalf of stockholders, one in 1987 and the other this year. When the Metropolitan Water Board was abolished in 1974, Thames water authority took over responsibility for Metropolitan Water stocks: under the Water Act 1989 any outstanding liabilities were passed to Thames Water plc, and are a matter between that company and those persons who have an interest as stockholders.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether his Department will issue advice to poll tax officials on the powers in the Local Government Finance Act that allow an electoral registration officer to inspect the registers.

Mr. Key: Detailed guidance on the responsibilities of community charge registration officers is contained in the community charge practice notes, copies of which have been placed in the Library of the House. The Home Office also issued guidance on 10 August 1990 which advises electoral registration officers on their right of access to the community charges register.

London Residuary Body

Mr. John Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how much money has been distributed to London boroughs by the London residuary body since the abolition of the Greater London council.

Mr. Key: A total of £486 million in capital receipts and £184 million in revenue balances.

Credit Approvals

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment if he will publish the basic credit approvals for local authorities for 1991-92 classified by *(a)* specific service and *(b)* individual local authorities.

Mr. Portillo: Basic credit approvals for individual local authorities for 1991-92 will be announced in due course.

Redditch Borough Council

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment who submitted the original complaint of anti-competitive behaviour against Redditch borough council to his Department and when; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: It is our policy not to reveal the identity of the originators of complaints about failures by local authorities to comply with the requirements of part I of the Local Government Act 1988. I can confirm, however, that my Department first wrote to Redditch borough council on the matter of the refuse and other cleansing contract in July 1990.

Street Cleaning

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what response he has received from local authorities to his decision to postpone competitive tendering deadlines to enable the authorities affected to let their street cleaning contracts on the basis of the proposed code of practice on litter; and what consideration he has given to this response.

Mr. Portillo: We have received a number of submissions from local authorities about our decision to extend competition deadlines for street cleaning. In particular, it has been drawn to our attention that authorities whose work has until 1 April 1991 fallen outside the provisions of the Local Government Act 1988 because expenditure incurred has fallen below £100,000 per annum are in a similar position to those authorities mentioned in the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Esher (Mr. Taylor) on 20 July which have already been granted an extension. I therefore intend to substitute a later deadline of 1 August 1991 for all authorities whose street cleaning work is required to be submitted to competition by 1 April 1991. I shall make an order giving effect to this intention. My right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales will make similar arrangements for Scottish and Welsh authorities.

Local Authority Staff

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment how many people are in employment *(a)* full time and *(b)* part time in each local authority; what percentage of that authority's population each figure represents; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key *[holding answer 14 November 1990]:* I have today placed the available information based on local authority staffing figures for March 1990 in the Library of the House.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Bill Michie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he last met local authority representatives to discuss the effects of cuts in direct subsidies for community charge/housing benefits on the level of community charges for 1991-92; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: I have been asked to reply.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of State met representatives of the local authority associations on 24 September to discuss the proposal to reduce from 97 per cent. to 95 per cent. the rate of direct subsidy for community charge benefit and certain housing benefit cases from April 1991. This change has been fully taken into account in the proposed local authority finance settlements for 1991-92, and the distributional consequences should be minimal.

THE ARTS

Items in Lieu of Tax

Dr. Goodson-Wickes: To ask the Minister for the Arts if there have been any items accepted in lieu of tax or allocated since an announcement was last made on the subject to the House.

Mr. Mellor: Since my announcement on 31 October at column *575*, I am pleased to announce that a painting by W. R. Sickert, entitled "Girl at a Window, Little Rachel" has been accepted in satisfaction of £84,000 tax. No decision on the allocation of this offer has yet to be taken.

I would also like to inform the House of two refunds my Department has received of moneys originally paid to the Inland Revenue for items accepted in lieu of tax. These receipts have arisen because of reassessment of the position on the estates concerned. The first relates to the acceptance of a series of 20 watercolour illustrations by J. M. W. Turner announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on 13 January 1988 at column *293*. My Department has been refunded £2,852·81 of the original payment making the final cost of acceptance of the offer £230,897·19. The second receipt, for £19·15, relates to the acceptance of a painting known as "Fabula" by El Greco which was announced by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on 20 April 1989 at column *254*. The final cost of acceptance for this item was therefore £947,117·73. The refunded moneys have been paid directly into the Consolidated Fund and will not be added to this year's acceptance in lieu provision.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Civil Service Relocation

Dr. Michael Clark: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about the terms on which civil servants are relocated.

Mr. Ryder: As the House was informed on 17 January 1990 at columns *288-89* departmental Ministers have already announced decisions to relocate a substantial number of civil service posts away from London and the south-east over the next two to three years. These transfers of work not only represent good value for money for the taxpayer but also give advantages to staff and management, plus important benefits to the new locations, nearly all of which are the focus of the Government's regional or inner-city policies.

The moves need careful planning. Many jobs which are being relocated will be filled by local recruitment, but sufficient numbers of experienced and mobile staff will need to move with their jobs so that continuity is

maintained and essential work is not put at risk. Accordingly Departments ensure that their staff and the civil service unions are consulted. Departments make every effort to ensure that, wherever possible, even staff with a mobility obligation move on a voluntary basis, and, of course, they already have a number of measures available to them for assisting mobile staff to meet the costs of transfers that are in the public interest.

These measures include advances of up to six months' salary for house purchase, reimbursement of the actual costs of moving, special arrangements for meeting additional costs where the move is into a more expensive housing area, meeting the interest costs of any necessary bridging loans, payment of additional travel costs as an alternative to moving home, and, for moves out of London, payments over five years of amounts up to the level of London weighting. This range of measures compares very favourably with those offered by private sector employers.

Most of these measures are intended for staff who decide to transfer their family home to the new location. Surveys of public and private sector relocations have shown that certain staff are reluctant to relocate for fear of damaging a spouse's career or disrupting their children's education at a key stage. Like other employers the Government take account of such concerns in the terms offered to staff relocating to a new area.

The range of relocation assistance available to Departments is therefore being widened to include the discretion to offer, where it is cost-effective to do so, an alternative to existing permanent transfer terms to mobile staff who, for domestic reasons, are reluctant to move the family home. The additional discretion will enable relevant staff to take accommodation at the new location without prejudice to their existing family home. The assistance offered will comprise an advance of up to six months' salary to secure the new accommodation, to be repaid over seven years, help with some of the setting-up costs, assistance with legal costs and a tapering allowance for up to 10 years to meet part of the mortgage costs. Such assistance will be conditional on agreement to arrangements for sharing between the individual and the Government the proceeds of disposal when he or she moves again and the new accommodation is sold. In addition all such assistance will be taxable.

The costs of these measures, which are expected to fall below the costs of existing transfer terms, will be contained within agreed running costs limits, and will be recovered from savings generated by the relocation.

European Currency Unit

Mr. Chris Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in drawing up his proposals on a hard ecu for the forthcoming intergovernmental conference, whether he intends to propose any restrictions on the use of the hard ecu within the domestic economy.

Mr. Maples: The hard ecu would be used to the extent that the Government, companies and individuals chose to do so.

Pension Funds

Dr. Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money has *(a)* been recouped from pension funds and *(b)* returned to the employers in each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Maude *[holding answer 14 November 1990]:* Information is not available in the form requested. The table below gives information derived from pension funds reports to the Inland Revenue on action which they propose to take to remove surpluses, following the provisions of the Finance Act 1986.

£ million

Schemes reporting in	*Refunds to employers*	*Tax due on refund*
1987-88	91	37
1988-89	224	90
1989-90	423	169

Note: The amounts shown represent figures for schemes reporting to the Inland Revenue in each year where proposals have been agreed by the superannuation funds office. The tax may not yet have been paid if the proposals have not yet been implemented.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Ecuador Rain Forest

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information the Overseas Development Administration has on British Gas's proposals for development in the Ecuador rain forest.

Mrs. Chalker: We have been informed of British Gas's exploration activities in Ecuador but have no information about any proposals for development.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Nunnykirk Hall School

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science when he expects to give a substantive reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed of 19 July about the application of Nunnykirk Hall school, Northumberland, for non-maintained status, and to the application made by the school to the Department on 9 February; and whether he will make a statement as to the reason for the delay.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The preparation of a substantive reply to the letter received from the hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed has required detailed research, but I shall reply shortly.

Schools, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what reports he has received providing information about damage caused to Bradford schools by fire; if he will consider making a supplementary allocation to Bradford local education authority to meet any shortfall between insurance payments made and the full cost of replacing school accommodation destroyed by fire; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Fallon: Bradford local education authority has been in touch with the Department about the damage

caused by fires over the weekend of 3 and 4 November at Gregory middle school and Tyersal first school in Bradford. The resources required for reinstatement of the damaged accommodation at these schools are a matter for negotiation in the first instance between the Bradford local education authority and its insurers.

Expenditure

Mr. Anthony Coombs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what proportion of gross national product was spent on education in each of the OECD countries in 1979 and the latest year for which figures are available; and what was per capita spending on education in each OECD country in the same years.

Mr. Alan Howarth: The readily available data are as follows:

Current Education Expenditure as a percentage of Gross National Product

	1979	*1986*	
Australia	5·3	5·3	
Belgium[1]	5·8	5·1	(1987)
Canada	7·2	6·7	(1987)
Denmark	5·5	7·6	(1987)
France[2]	3·3	3·3	
Germany, Federal Republic of	4·0	4·0	
Italy	4·4	[4]4·5	(1983)
Japan	3·9	5·0	
Netherlands	7·3	5·9	(1985)
Spain	2·3	2·9	(1986)
Sweden	8·3	6·7	(1987)
United Kingdom	5·2	4·8	
United States of America	6·7	[3]6·2	(1985)

Source: UNESCO Statistical Yearbooks 1983, 1989.

Public Current Expenditure on Education per capita 1986[4]

	£ Sterling at Purchasing Power Parity
Australia	330
Belgium	320
Canada	540
Denmark[5]	440
France	330
German, Federal Republic of	260
Italy[6]	220
Japan[7]	230
Netherlands	360
Spain[6]	130
Sweden	420
United Kingdom	300
United States of America	420

Source: Table DD Education Statistics for the United Kingdom 1989

Notes:

[1] Expenditure of Ministry of Education only.

[2] Metropolitan France.

[3] Total public and private expenditure on education.

[4] Figures for 1979 are not readily available.

[5] Provisional.

[6] 3rd level qualifiers estimated for Denmark, France, Germany and Spain. Expenditure detail by level estimated via 1983 for Italy and 1979 for Spain.

[7] Estimated. Includes some private funding, but excludes fees.

ENERGY

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how many of those who have registered an interest in electricity privatisation are from households where more than one member has registered an interest.

Mr. Wakeham: The number of persons registered for the sale will be disclosed in the prospectus to be published on 21 November. It would be inappropriate to anticipate its publication or to go beyond what will be set out in that document.

Nuclear Reprocessing

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will summarise the nuclear reprocessing deal between the German Nukem company and the Atomic Energy Authority; what amount of nuclear material is expected to be transported to the United Kingdom under this deal; where it will be reprocessed; what arrangements have been made for its transportation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: This is a matter for the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority.

Nuclear Fusion Power

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what reports, including from the European Commission, he has on nuclear fusion power and its potentially serious environmental problems; if he will summarise the problems referred to; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Baldry: My Department has lately seen the Fusion Programme Evaluation Board report prepared for the Commission of the European Communities and published in July 1990 and the report of the Senior Committee on Environmental, Safety and Economic Aspects of Magnetic Fusion Energy, published in the USA in September 1989. These reports concur in finding that fusion potentially has significant safety and environmental advantages over alternative methods of large-scale electricity generation, but that the realisation of this potential in a practical system requires solutions to a number of challenging problems. These problems concern the development of materials, the use of tritium, and the maintainability of the reactor.

Sir Trevor Holdsworth

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy how he arrived at the salary to be paid to Sir Trevor Holdsworth at National Power.

Mr. Wakeham: The salary for the National Power chairmanship was determined as being appropriate for the post.

PRIME MINISTER

Security Services

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister whether the role of the security services has been reviewed in the wake of improved relations with much of eastern Europe; whether any reviews are planned; whether any savings have been ascertained; and if she will make a statement.

The Prime Minister: It has been the practice of successive Governments not to comment on intelligence and security matters.

Engagements

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Prime Minister if she will list her official engagements for 15 November.

The Prime Minister: This morning I presided at a meeting of the Cabinet and had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House I shall be having further meetings later today, including one with Chief Buthelezi.

WALES

Advisers

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will set out the process that is followed prior to the appointment of an adviser to him including details of the authorisation at *(a)* official and *(b)* ministerial level that is required;

(2) what is the total cost to public funds, on a full-year basis, of appointing Mr. Rod Richards as his personal adviser.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave him on Tuesday 13 November.

Sketty Primary School

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what his Department assesses to be the pupil capacity of Sketty primary school; and what are actual pupil numbers.

Sir Wyn Roberts: As at January 1990 there were 407 pupils on roll at Sketty primary school. The Department has made no estimate of pupil capacity at the school but I understand that the West Glamorgan education authority operates to an overall maximum figure of 420, as estimated in accordance with Welsh Office circular 20/88.

Llwyn Mawr School

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will extend the deadline for West Glamorgan county council to implement his direction for the Llwyn Mawr site in Swansea.

Mr. Grist: My right hon. Friend is currently considering all the representations he has received following the issue of the direction.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what alternative sites for a new school will exist within the same catchment area when the sale of the Llwyn Mawr takes place.

Mr. Grist: It is for the local education authority to make decisions on school provision and to determine the suitability of individual sites.

DEFENCE

Defence Sales

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many items of equipment of types to be limited by the CFE treaty have been sold or given to other nations by the United Kingdom; and at what cost.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not the practice of this, or previous, Administrations to comment on individual defence sales transactions.

WE177

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) whether he has taken a decision on the replacement of the WE177 with an air-to-surface missile;

(2) if he will make a statement on possible co-operation with France on a replacement for the WE177 free-fall bomb.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: We are looking at both French and United States systems as possible replacements for our WE177 free-fall bomb. However, no decision has been taken.

Loan Service Personnel

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will state the purpose for which service personnel are on loan service in *(a)* Bahrain, *(b)* Brunei, *(c)* Jordan, *(d)* Oman, *(e)* Qatar, *(f)* Sudi Arabia and *(g)* the United Arab Emirates;

(2) if he will state the purpose for which service personnel are on loan service in *(a)* Botswana, *(b)* the Gambia, *(c)* Ghana, *(d)* Kenya, *(e)* Lesotho, *(f)* Namibia, *(g)* Nigeria, *(h)* Sudan, *(i)* Swaziland and *(j)* Zimbabwe;

(3) if he will state the purpose for which service personnel are on loan service in *(a)* Bangladesh, *(b)* Hong Kong, *(c)* Indonesia, *(d)* Malaysia, *(e)* Mauritius, *(f)* new Zealand and *(g)* Singapore;

(4) if he will state the purpose for which service personnel are on loan service in *(a)* Dominica, *(b)* Barbados, *(c)* Belize, *(d)* Bermuda, *(e)* Fiji, *(f)* Grenada, *(g)* St. Lucia, *(h)* St. Vincent and *(i)* the Turks and Caicos Islands

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Loan service personnel are employed on a variety of military assistance tasks for overseas Governments. Details are normally confidential between Her Majesty's Government and the country concerned.

Radiation Exposure

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he hopes to come to a conclusion about a no-fault compensation scheme for service-related personnel who have been exposed to nuclear radiation; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I am considering the possibility of introducing a no-fault compensation scheme for MOD personnel. I hope to come to a conclusion on the merits of such a scheme early next year.

Falklands (Ecology Report)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment and monitoring he has undertaken of the report by Dr. Miles in 1983, undertaken by his Department, the Nature Conservancy Council and the Natural Environment Research Council on the management of the ecology and sea bird life of the Falklands.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The 1984 report by Dr. Miles, which was an ecological impact assessment of the construction of Mount Pleasant airfield and associated developments, recommended inter alia the establishment of monitoring arrangements to assess the effects. The recommendations of the report have all been actioned and there has been no significant change in the ecology as a result of the construction of the airfield. More generally, the Ministry of Defence remains conscious of its responsibilities in assisting the Falkland Island Government in their management of the ecology of the islands.

Defence Review

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what will be the percentage reduction in real terms from current defence expenditure if all of the proposals outlined in "Options for Change" are implemented.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State indicated in his statement to the House in July, the "Options" proposals will bring savings and a reduction in the share of GDP taken by defence. The plans for the defence budget which were announced in the autumn statement envisage that on current inflation assumptions provision for 1993-94 will be 6 per cent. lower in real terms than the estimated outturn for 1990-91.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the target date for the achievement of the force reductions outlined in "Options for Change".

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. and learned Gentleman to the answer which I gave on 30 October to the hon. Member for Gateshead, East (Ms. Quin) at column *501*.

HMS Warspite and Churchill

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much of the expenditure on the refitting of HMS Warspite was incurred after the discovery of a fault in its reactor;

(2) what is the total cost to date of the refitting of HMS Warspite.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what amount of money has been spent to date on the refit of *(a)* HMS Warspite and *(b)* HMS Churchill.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The cost of the refits on HMS Warspite and HMS Churchill is still being negotiated with the contractors. Such costs are in any case commercially confidential.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what were the factors which led to the decision to scrap HMS Warspite.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what influence the "Options for Change" study has had on the decision to decommission HMS Warspite.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence's announcement on 25 July at column 470 envisaged a reduction in the submarine fleet to around 16 boats, about three quarters of which would be nuclear-powered. This reduction in force levels is to be achieved by decommissioning older, less capable boats, such as HMS Warspite, while retaining the more modern ones in service.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many submarines in service and of what class have the same type of reactor as HMS Warspite.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to comment on matters relating to the design of nuclear-powered submarines.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the date of commencement of the refitting of HMS Warspite.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the date on which *(a)* HMS Warspite and *(b)* HMS Churchill started their refit programmes.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The refit of HMS Warspite commenced in 1988 and that of HMS Churchill in 1989.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the fault was discovered in the reactor of HMS Warspite.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what faults have been discovered in the course of the refit of HMS Warspite with the submarine's nuclear reactor and its associated systems.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: It is not our practice to comment on specific events or features relating to the refits of the Royal Navy's nuclear-powered submarines or on matters relating to nuclear submarine design.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what part the reactor fault played in the decision to scrap HMS Warspite.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what influence technical defects discovered in the course of the refit of HMS Warspite has had on the decision to decommission the submarine.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A range of factors were taken into account before deciding which submarines to decommission to achieve the lower force level of about 16 boats, including age, capability, material state and cost of maintenance and operation. All of these factors are relevant in the case of HMS Warspite.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken to ascertain whether any other submarines in service have similar reactor faults to that found in HMS Warspite.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: A programme of inspections of all the Royal Navy's in-service nuclear-powered submarines is in progress following the discovery of a

technical defect in one of the submarines during refit. It is not our practice to comment on specific aspects of nuclear-powered submarines.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what was the date on which a decision was taken to scrap HMS Warspite.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The decision to reduce the submarine force level to around 16 was announced to the House on 25 July at column 471. The consequential decision to decommission HMS Warspite was taken in early September this year.

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes to the maritime threat to the United Kingdom have occurred in the last two years; and what effect these changes have had on the decision to decommission HMS Warspite.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence, on 25 July at column 470, which outlined the major changes which are taking place in the international scene.

Against that background, we aim to maintain the force levels envisaged in that statement with the more modern and capable assets in service or under construction; older platforms, such as HMS Warspite, are therefore being decommissioned.

Naval Vessels

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if ministerial approval is required for any decision to scrap Royal Navy vessels.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Yes.

Postal Services (Gulf)

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will arrange for reduced rate postage for parcel post by air to service personnel serving in the general area of the Persian Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Forces concessionary postage rates for service personnel serving in the Gulf were introduced on 12 September. The forces concessionary scheme normally provides for letters to be sent by air and parcels up to 10kg by sea at postage rates generally in line with the United Kingdom inland postage rate. At present all mail to the Gulf is being carried by RAF aircraft with a transit time of about five days for letters and 10 days for parcels.

Naval Housing, Milford haven

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the disposal of his Department's houses on and adjacent to Royal Navy armaments depot Milford Haven.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Once the disposal of the main site has been arranged, occupied houses will be offered for sale to sitting tenants and vacant houses will be sold on the open market.

Submarines

Mr. O'Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many announcements of submarine decommissioning have been made since 25 July.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The decommissioning of HMS Churchill was announced on 29 October at column *414*; and that of HMS Warspite on 1 November at column *770*. In addition, on 31 July and MOD press release was issued in which it was stated that Her Majesty's ships Onslaught, Odin and Conqueror are to be decommissioned.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Living Beings (Patenting)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement concerning the Government's policies towards proposals to legislate to allow the patenting of living beings and the implications for farming and research in this country.

Mr. Maclean: Discussions are continuing on the European Community proposal for a directive on the legal protection of biotechnological inventions. United Kingdom patent law does not permit the patenting of any variety of animal or plant or any essentially biological process; neither does the draft directive propose to do so. However, under present United Kingdom law and the proposed directive, microbiological processes (such as might be used in genetic engineering techniques) and their products can be patented. I expect farming and research in the United Kingdom to benefit from new developments in biotechnology, as it has benefited from other new technology.

Racing Greyhounds

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many representations he has received concerning the live export of racing greyhounds to Europe; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maclean: I have received a number of letters expressing concern about a trade in greyhounds from the Irish Republic to Spain. That is a matter for the authorities in the Irish Republic. There is no comparable trade from the United Kingdom.

Fish Quotas

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what account was taken of the verdict in the legal action initiated by the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations on his previous decision on the Hague preference in his latest decision in that case.

Mr. Curry: The terms of the understanding reached with the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations were borne in mind in the decision-making process in 1990.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what account he took of the views of the Grimsby industry in allocating 3,255 tonnes of North sea haddock to Scotland after his consultation document of 8 August.

Mr. Curry: Fisheries Ministers took careful account of all the views received from the industry, including those of Grimsby.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the cost criteria

used in deciding to allocate extra fish gained as a result of the Hague preference to north Britain; what is the area he has defined as north Britain; and what is the basis of his definition.

Mr. Curry: Fisheries Ministers decided on the definition of Bridlington and northwards as best meeting the needs of fishing communities given the circumstances which applied in 1990.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the loss of fish in tonnes to Grimsby, Fleetwood and Hull as a result of his decisions on the Hague preference.

Mr. Curry: Fisheries Ministers considered a range of options when deciding how to allocate west of Scotland whiting and North sea haddock in 1990. Some of those options involved allocating fish to Grimsby, Hull and Fleetwood. The total quantities involved in the allocation of these stocks were small.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the communities he has defined as communities in north Britain dependent on fishing.

Mr. Curry: For the purposes of the allocation of "Hague preference" North sea haddock and west of Scotland whiting in 1990 the local communities, particularly dependent on fishing and allied industries were defined as Bridlington and northwards, on the basis of all relevant information available to Fisheries Ministers.

Food Industry

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will detail what measures are being taken by his Ministry actively to encourage the United Kingdom food industry to provide comprehensive nutrition information; and if he will make a statement on how the effectiveness of these measures is being monitored and evaluated.

Mr. Maclean: My officials have written to interested parties enclosing a copy of the EC nutrition labelling (rules) directive adopted on 24 September, and summarising its main provisions. This supplements existing guidance to the industry and encourages manufacturers and retailers to provide comprehensive nutrition declarations in accordance with the directive. I shall consider further action in the light of surveys conducted on the extent of nutrition labelling and the level of consumer understanding.

Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy

Mr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what are the latest figures for *(a)* suspected cases and *(b)* confirmed cases of BSE on a county-by-county basis in England, Wales and Scotland.

Mr. Gummer: The information up to 9 November 1990 is as follows:

Region	*Suspects*	*Confirmed*
Northern		
Cleveland	29	27
Cumbria	383	335
Durham	80	76
Humberside	102	89
Northumberland	87	74
Tyne and Wear	3	2
Yorkshire, North	800	713
Yorkshire, South	65	59
Yorkshire, West	92	84
Mid and West		
Cheshire	541	450
Derbyshire	325	284
Hereford and Worcester	421	383
Lancashire	450	397
Leicestershire	514	465
Manchester	17	11
Merseyside	15	9
Nottinghamshire	144	125
Shropshire	537	475
Staffordshire	436	380
West Midlands	16	14
Warwickshire	239	212
Eastern		
Bedfordshire	68	58
Cambridgeshire	85	73
Essex	105	91
Hertfordshire	110	93
Lincolnshire	186	163
Norfolk	344	292
Northamptonshire	186	167
Suffolk	271	243
South-East		
Berkshire	153	125
Buckinghamshire	200	160
Hampshire	906	815
Isle of Wight	161	144
Kent	531	457
London	9	8
Oxfordshire	371	320
Surrey	234	206
Sussex East	312	267
Sussex West	586	514
South-West		
Avon	472	372
Cornwall	1,732	1,515
Devon	2,478	2,214
Dorset	1,950	1,701
Gloucestershire	736	614
Somerset	1,905	1,608
Wiltshire	1,443	1,213
Wales		
Clwyd	304	193
Dyfed	838	759
Mid Glamorgan	56	47
South Glamorgan	61	55
West Glamorgan	10	8
Gwent	175	150
Gwynedd	69	57
Powys	202	168
South Scotland		
Borders	30	23
Central	27	23
Dumfries	125	112
Lothian	17	15
Strathclyde	190	168
North Scotland		
Fife	48	43
Grampian	154	136
Highland	40	35
Orkney	9	7
Shetland	2	2
Tayside	68	56
Western Isles	1	1

Region	Suspects	Confirmed
Total	23,256	20,155

Farms

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the titles of the jobs of people he employs to visit farms and check details of grant and subsidy payments; how many of them he employs, on a region-by-region basis; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: The verification visits to farms on grant and subsidy schemes are generally undertaken, among other duties, by staff in the executive officer (field) grade. The number of EOs (field) currently employed in the Ministry's regional offices are as follows:

	Number
Northern Region	29
Midlands and Western Region	[1]19
Eastern Region	19
South Western Region	18
South Eastern Region	11
England total	96·5

[1] Plus one half time official.

Where specific technical verification is required, appropriate officers in the Ministry's Agricultural Development Advisory Service may also visit farms.

Tuberculosis

Dr. David Clark: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what has been the cost of the tuberculosis eradication scheme for badgers for each of the last 10 years, including 1990-91; what he estimates future expenditure for the next three years to be; and if he will make a statement;

(2) what has been the cost of the tuberculosis eradication scheme for each of the last 10 years, including 1990-91; what he estimates future expenditure to be for the next three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Gummer: A total of £0·4 million was spent on the badger control strategy in 1989. Comparable figures are not available for other years. The annual cost of the bovine tuberculosis eradication scheme (which relates to action taken in respect of tuberculosis in cattle, badgers and latterly deer) is:

Total cost of the scheme

	£ million
1981-82	n/a
1982-83	n/a
1983-84	n/a
1984-85	6·3
1985-86	7·6
1986-87	7·1
1987-88	6·7
1988-89	6·5
1989-90	8·4
1990-91	[1]9·1
1991-92	[2]9·3
1992-93	[2]9·6
1993-94	[2]9·6

[1] Estimated.
[2] Forecast.

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Council of Agriculture Ministers meetings to reach a common Community negotiating position for the general agreement on tariffs and trade talks and the measure to be recommended so as to ensure a properly managed and incremental change in the present system.

Mr. Curry: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Stewart) on 8 November at column *8*.

Beef and Lamb

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to the average price of *(a)* beef per kilo and *(b)* lamb per kilo received by British farmers and the average retail price at which it is sold in British shops.

Mr. Maclean: The average market price for all clean cattle for the week commencing 29 October 1990 was 102·52p per kg liveweight.

Average retail prices for the same week range form £5·94 per kg for topside, to £14·45 per kg for fillet steak and £3·41 per kg for best mince.

The average market price for lamb for the week commencing 29 October was 143·3p per kg. Average retail prices for the main cuts of home-killed lamb in the same week were:

	£ kg
1. Leg	4·11
2. Loin	4·75
3. Shoulder	2·29

Since the liveweight prices are for the whole animal on its feet and the retail prices are for meat as sold (generally off the bone) the two are not directly comparable.

Fishing Licences

Mr. Harris: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes he proposes to make to the conditions attached to fishing licences, in the light of the judgments of the European Court of Justice in the Agegate and Jaderow cases.

Mr. Curry: The Agegate and Jaderow proceedings were originally commenced against the Department in 1986 in order to challenge the validity of the fish licensing conditions designed to procure the proper implementation of the quota system under the common fisheries policy. In the course of those proceedings our courts referred certain legal questions to the European Court of Justice. The European Court of Justice delivered its judgments on 14 December 1989 and the matter is to return to the English divisional court.

The ECJ judgments cast doubt on the validity of the crewing condition in its present form but upheld our right to have an operating condition provided that certain rights were respected. We have been considering what changes need to be made to our licence conditions in the light of these judgments. At present we are minded to tighten up the operating conditions in order to improve compliance

and to make enforcement easier. This will probably entail conditions such as the following applying to all vessels which do not land at least half their annual catch in the United Kingdom.

(i) they will make at least four visits to United Kingdom ports in each half year (January-June and July-December);

(ii) vessels to give at least 24 hours' notice of each visit, and to stay in port for at least eight hours; and

(iii) there should be a minimum period of 10 days between "qualifying visits".

The licence condition concerning the nationality and residence of crew members would probably be dropped, except in respect of non-EC nationals, as might the condition concerning social security payments (since this is covered elsewhere by Community law and the obligation to pay social security continues irrespective of whether there is a licence condition to that effect).

These changes would have important implications for the Agegate and Jaderow cases and we have discussed them at their request with representatives of the Spanish fishing industry who have indicated that they accept that we were entitled to ensure that there is a real economic link between their vessels and the British fishing industry and to impose an effective operating condition. They have also indicated their intention to employ at least two British crewmen on their vessels, in addition to the British skipper and mate, and to land fish in British ports on at least two occasions in each half year. These discussions are very encouraging.

The registration requirements in respect of fishing vessels contained in part II of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 will, subject to the interim orders of the European Court and the House of Lords, continue in force. This means, in particular, that fishing vessels may be registered here—and thus fish against British quotas—only if each vessel is managed, and its operations are directed and controlled from within the United Kingdom. The cases in the European Court challenging the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act 1988 will be vigorously contested by the Government. An oral hearing will take place at the European Court on 17 January 1991.

Fisheries Departments will in due course be issuing a detailed notice about the new licence conditions and licences will be amended with effect from 1 January 1991.

These amended conditions would contribute towards the objective of ensuring that British licensed fishing vessels have a real link with this country.

Heracleum Montegazzianum

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the locations within the three counties of Yorkshire and Humberside that are affected with heracleum montegazzianum; and what advice has been issued in these counties to warn public of the dangers of coming into contact with heracleum montegazzianum.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: I have been asked to reply.

My Department has no detailed information on this subject but my advice from the Nature Conservancy Council is that the species is scarce in these areas. I am not aware that any advice has been issued about the dangers to the public of coming into contact with it.

HEALTH

Neurosurgery

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are currently on all local health authority waiting lists for neurology operations in England and Wales; and how long patients have to wait for their operations in this department.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: At March 1990, the latest date for which information is available centrally, there were 3,721 patients on neurosurgery in-patient and day case waiting lists. What matters more than total number on the list is the time patients have to wait. The proportion of patients waiting more than 12 months in neurosurgery has fallen from 27 per cent. in March 1989 to 25 per cent. in March 1990. In addition, the number of patients treated per year in this specialty has risen by 6 per cent. from 39,500 to 41,700 in the same period.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received regarding waiting lists for neurosurgery.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: We have no record of any representations about waiting lists for neurosurgery in the 12 months ending 13 November 1990.

Meningitis

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been allocated for *(a)* research into and *(b)* help for families and sufferers of meningitis over the past 10 years; and what extra help will be given to this area of medicine by public awareness campaigns during the winter months.

Mr. Dorrell: The Medical Research Council, which receives its grant in aid from the Department of Education and Science, provided £887,000 for research during the period 1985-86 to 1989-90.

This Department has made available £72,800 for research into meningitis for the period 1986-90; we are also awaiting the final report of a case control study of meningococcal disease in eight west country health districts from 1 May 1988 to 30 April 1990.

Information about funding for meningitis research over the last 10 years is available only at disproportionate cost.

The public health laboratory service's communicable disease surveillance centre began a study on 1 November, costing £135,000 and fully funded by the Department, to investigate candidate vaccines against haemophilus influenzae b(Hib) infection, one of the causes of bacterial meningitis. The centre also keeps the incidence of meningitis under close review, and is available to advise health authorities if an outbreak occurs.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has made a detailed and quantified assessment of the relation between closure of national health service wards and cuts in hospital beds available for in-patient treatment and the increase of waiting lists.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: There is no simple relation between the number of beds, the number of patients

treated, and the number awaiting treatment. Between March 1989 and March 1990 (the latest date for which comprehensive data are available) the number of available beds fell by 4·6 per cent., the number of patients treated per year rose by 4·4 per cent., and the number of patients waiting over one year fell by 7 per cent.

Cholera Vaccine

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the possibility of cholera vaccine no longer being produced in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Production difficulties earlier this year at the United Kingdom manufacturing site led to the temporary importation of cholera vaccine. The production difficulties have now been resolved and I am glad to say that the United Kingdom-produced vaccine will become available early next year. I expect that cholera vaccine will continue to be produced in the United Kingdom for the foreseeable future.

Baby Care

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the funding of regionally planned perinatal and neonatal intensive care; and what is his policy towards the introduction of regional contracts to provide care for ill babies.

Mr. Dorrell: Funding and contractual arrangements for perinatal and neonatal intensive care services are matters for regional and health authorities to determine in the light of local circumstances and requirements. We expect regional health authorities to ensure that the new contractual arrangements continue to provide for the referral of vulnerable and very sick babies to appropriate units, both before and following birth. The NHS management executive will pay particular attention to monitoring and reviewing the provision of maternity and neonatal services during the annual accountability review process in 1991-92.

Helicopter Medical Service

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the independent evaluation of the helicopter emergency medical service by Professor Brian Williams is expected to be completed; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: The evaluation of this service is due to begin early in the new year. It will take three years with the report expected in autumn 1994.

Bradford Health Authority

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reports have been submitted to him about action being taken by Bradford health authority to meet the financial deficit for the current year; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Measures to be taken by individual health authorities are for agreement between the region and the district concerned.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital beds there were within Bradford health authority area *(a)* in November 1989 and *(b)* to the latest available date in 1990; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Dorrell: Information held centrally shows that there were on average 2,188 beds (all categories) available within Bradford district health authority in the quarter ending December 1989. For the quarter ending March 1990, the latest available centrally, the number is 2,167.

In the year ending March 1990, 67,226 in-patient cases were treated by Bradford district health authority, an increase of 3 per cent. over the previous year. Between 1979 and 1989, the number of in-patients treated rose by 21 per cent.

For further information the hon. Member may like to contact Mr. Nerurker, chairman of Bradford district health authority.

Lynfield Mount Hospital, Bradford

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what public consultation he proposes concerning Lynfield Mount hospital in Bradford becoming a national health service trust; what view has been expressed by Bradford health authority, the Yorkshire regional health authority or Bradford community health council; to whom consultants, doctors, nurses and other health workers and the general public may object; and if he will ensure that no action to issue any prospectus is taken until he has taken a decision concerning the application for Bradford acute hospital services becoming a national health service trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not received an application from Lynfield Mount hospital to become a national health service trust. The decision on whether, and if so when, to submit an application is a matter for local decision. If an application is made my right hon. Friend will direct Yorkshire regional health authority to consult the local community health council and such other bodies or persons as it considers appropriate and report the results of consultation to my right hon. Friend. It will be for the regional health authority to decide the range of interests to be consulted formally, but we have made it clear that this should include relevant health authorities, family health service authorities; staff in the proposed trust; local GPs; the local community and local Members of Parliament.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many submissions he has received to date concerning the establishment of a national health service trust in Bradford; how many *(a)* supported the establishment of such a trust, *(b)* opposed such a proposal, *(c)* urged him to defer any decision and *(d)* expressed no view; if he will list the names of the individuals/organisations who made the submissions referred to at *(a)*, *(b)*, *(c)* and *(d)*; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: Yorkshire regional health authority has been responsible for undertaking consultation on the application for Bradford hospitals to become a national health service trust. The hon. Member may wish to ask the region for information on the views of those who commented on the application. All comments are publicly available except where the commentator has requested that his comments should be treated as confidential.

Children

Mr. Fraser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children, in number and by percentage, have been born in each of the last three years to parents who are not married.

Mr. Dorrell: The information requested for England and Wales is as follows:

Year	Live births outside marriage	Percentage of total live births
1987	158,431	23·2
1988	177,352	25·6
1989	185,804	27·0

These data are published quarterly in "Population Trends" (HMSO).

SCOTLAND

Heart Surgery

Mr. Michael J. Martin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many patients who were on the waiting list for heart surgery within the Greater Glasgow health board area have died of heart attacks prior to their operations in the last 12 months.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: In the period 1 November 1989 to 31 October 1990, 43 deaths were recorded. Information on the actual cause of death is not recorded centrally.

Self-governing Schools

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will make a statement on the financial arrangements to be made available to schools in Scotland which opt for self-governing status.

Mr. Michael Forsyth: Self-governing schools will be directly funded by the Secretary of State in accordance with arrangements to be laid down in financial regulations and to be expressed in subsidiary agreements between the Secretary of State and such schools. These regulations and agreements will cover questions such as determination of grant, the timing and manner of payments, the arrangements for accounts and audits, and other requirements to be met to secure the payment of grant.

Self-governing schools will be able to use the resources allotted on their behalf at their own discretion; this should ensure that substantial additional resources will reach the classroom to the benefit of pupils.

Self-governing schools will get their capital funding direct from the Secretary of State instead of being subject to the priorities applied by an education authority.

Scottish Homes

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will publish the terms of any agreement reached between Scottish Homes and Glasgow district council; and if he will show by constituency the number and value of projects engaged in by Scottish Homes under the agreement.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The details of these strategic agreements are matters for Scottish Homes and the local authority concerned. I have asked Sir James Mellon, chairman of Scottish Homes, to write direct to the hon. Member on this matter.

House Repairs

Mr. Sillars: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list all the repairs and maintenance grants available to owner-occupiers in Glasgow; and if he will show expenditure against each grant item for each of the past 12 years.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Local authorities may give grants for works of repair under section 248 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. Such grants are not confined to owner-occupiers. They may be awarded to landlords, tenants and commercial proprietors participating in works of common repair under statutory notice. Grant is not available for maintenance, which is the responsibility of the owner or tenant.

The following table lists expenditure on repairs grants by Glasgow district council from 1980 to 1989, the most recent year for which figures are available, in respect of all categories of applicant. No information is held centrally on grants to owner-occupiers alone. Comparable information is not available for earlier years.

	£'000
1980	666
1981	1,377
1982	3,704
1983	17,004
1984	30,876
1985	32,064
1986	24,144
1987	24,117
1988	23,575
1989	30,197

Deaf People

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what facilities are available in the district court, the sheriff court, the Court of Session and the High Court of Justiciary for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Voice reinforcement systems are provided where necessary in court rooms used by the supreme and sheriff courts, and emphasis is placed on securing good acoustic efficiency when new court rooms are being planned and existing court rooms refurbished. Information on the district courts is not held centrally. When parties to court proceedings are deaf or hard of hearing interpretation facilities may be used at the discretion of the court.

Land Sales

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland whether he intends to legislate to abolish the pre-emption rights of feudal superiors on land sales in Scotland and their powers to attach conditions to the use of land.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The Scottish Law Commission is engaged in a major review of property law in Scotland, including the question of feudal superiors' rights and powers. My right hon. and learned Friend proposes to await their recommendations before deciding what legislation might be needed.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants are having deductions made from their benefits *(a)* by category of claimant and *(b)* by type of deduction.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The latest information is for May 1989 in tables 10.1 to 10.4A of the income support annual statistical inquiry, a copy of which is in the Library.

Benefit Recipients, Shetland

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many benefit recipients in Shetland were in receipt of the transitional protection payment in April 1988, April 1989 and April 1990.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Income Support

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) whether he has any plans to bring forward proposals to repeal or amend *(a)* section 22(3) and *(b)* section 22(4) of the Social Security Act 1986; and if he will make a statement;

(2) if he has any plans to repeal or amend paragraph 13, schedule 2, of the Income Support (General) Regulations 1987 (SI 1967); and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The legislation concerned provides for the severe disability premium (currently £28·20 a week) in the calculation of income support, housing benefit and community charge benefit. This premium is intended for people who are in receipt of attendance allowance who live alone in the community, or who live with other people on a commercial basis, and provided invalid care allowance is not in payment for their care. We have no plans to change this policy.

Mr. Richard Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the families who will benefit from the recently announced £1 a week increase in child allowance are presently in receipt of income support; whether the increase will be disregarded in assessment for income support; and what would be the cost if the increase were to be so disregarded.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is estimated that about 1·2 million families on income support will receive the £1 increase in child benefit for the only, elder or eldest eligible child. The payment of this additional amount will be taken into account for income support purposes in the normal way. It is estimated that if it were to be disregarded in the assessment for income support the benefit cost would be approximately £65 million a year.

The income support rates will be increased from next April which will help many families with children.

Mr. Pendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he has any plans further to amend regulation 3 of the Income Support Regulations 1987 (SI 1967); and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: We have no current plans to do so.

Statutory Sick Pay

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security whether he will take steps to ensure that any draft regulations altering statutory sick pay rates from April 1991 are referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee in time for the Committee to allow a consultation period of at least six weeks, excluding Christmas week.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The proposed changes in statutory sick pay rates from April 1991 will be contained in an order to be made under section 7(1A) of the Social Security and Housing Benefits Act 1982 (as amended by paragraph 15 of schedule 6 to the Social Security Act 1990). Orders are not referred to the Social Security Advisory Committee. The order will be considered by each House under the affirmative resolution procedure.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what are the April 1990 and April 1991 equivalents of the rates of statutory sick pay introduced in April 1983 and the earnings bands to which they related, in real terms and as a proportion of average earnings, taking account of the best available estimate of April 1991 earnings.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The information is in the table:

April 1990[1] Equivalents of SSP rates in April 1983 expressed as a percentage of male average earnings[2]

	SSP Rates		*Average real value of benefit at April 1990 over the period April 1983 to March 1984*	*Equivalent value at April 1990 prices at date of uprating*	*As percentage male average earnings (gross)*	
	April 1983 £. d	*April 1990* £. d	£. d	£. d	*April 1983* per cent.	*April 1990* per cent.
Lower rate	27·20	39·25	39·56	40·37	16·5	13·3
Middle rate[3]	33·75	—	49·09	50·09	20·5	—
Standard rate	40·25	52·50	58·54	59·74	24·4	17·8

April 1990[1] Equivalents of earnings bands for SSP in April 1983 expressed as a percentage of male average earnings[2]

	Earnings band at April 1983 £	Earnings band at April 1990 £	Equivalent value at 1990 prices at date of uprating £	As percentage of male average earnings (gross) April 1983 per cent.	April 1990 per cent.
Lower rate	32·50 to 48·49	46·00 to 124·99	48·24 to 71·97	19·7 to 29·4	15·6 to 42·3
Middle rate[3]	48·50 to 64·99	—	71·99 to 96·46	29·4 to 39·5	—
Standard rate	65·00 or more	125 or more	96·48 or more	39·5	42·3

Notes:

[1] Earnings and RPI details for April 1991 are not available

[2] The majority of SSP recipients will get occupational sick pay on top of SSP when they are sick. In many cases this will bring the total payment received up to full pay.

[3] The middle rate of SSP was abolished in April 1987.

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the proportion of recipients of statutory sick pay who are also receiving occupational sick pay *(a)* of any amount and *(b)* to provide full basic pay when added to statutory sick pay, and the extent to which these proportions vary with duration of sickness.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Information is not available in the form requested, but research carried out by IFF Research Ltd. on behalf of the Department in 1988 shows that 91 per cent. of employees work for employers with occupational sick pay schemes. Of the private sector schemes, half cover all employees immediately regardless of other factors, for example, length of service and 83 per cent. top up SSP to full basic pay. Payments are usually made either for a fixed period of six months or vary according to length of service. The vast majority of SSP recipients are likely to be getting occupational sick pay.

Family Credit

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the current interval in working days between the date on which new applications or applications for renewal of family credit are received at the family credit unit and the date on which work commences on the processing of those applications.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The first stage in the processing of claims is registration; and normally all claims, whether new or renewal, are registered within 24 hours of receipt at the family credit unit.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to review the establishment at the family credit unit.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The establishment of the family credit unit is routinely reviewed at the end of each quarter. Adjustments are made as necessary to match staffing to changes in work intake. Additional resources have been deployed to deal with arrears of work which have accumulated recently.

NORTHERN IRELAND

EC Interreg Scheme

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps are being taken by Northern Ireland Government Departments and public agencies to avail themselves of funding from the European Community's Interreg scheme; and, in particular, what steps are being taken to comply with each of the development aims as outlined in European Community notice C(90)1562/3 which lays down guidelines for operational programmes under the Interreg scheme.

Mr. Cope: The Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland is liaising with the Department of Finance in Dublin to draw up a joint programme for submission to the European Commission towards the end of this year.

Following publication of the Interreg guidelines on 30 August, the Department of Finance and Personnel invited local interests to put forward proposals for inclusion in the programme; copies of the guidelines were also circulated to local bodies. Following this, a series of presentations was arranged for early October in Newry, Omagh and Coleraine to ensure local interests were fully aware of the requirements of the guidelines. In addition, a joint North/South conference of all interested parties was held in Enniskillen on 9 November. This conference was organised by the EC offices in Belfast and Dublin.

Of the four development aims mentioned in the guidelines, two do not apply directly to Northern Ireland as there is no external border with a third non-EC country. The development aims will be carefully borne in mind when the joint programme is being drawn up.

Mobility Allowance

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what plans he has to introduce measures to ensure that individuals who qualify for mobility allowance will continue to receive this allowance beyond their 75th birthday;

(2) what plans he has to ensure that pensioners, over 65 years of age, who otherwise would qualify for mobility allowance, will not be disqualified on grounds of age.

Mr. Needham: Mobility allowance can be paid only if the claim is made before age 66. However, people who have applied for and been awarded mobility allowance can continue to get it until age 80.

There are no plans to change the existing rules as it is intended to replace mobility allowance with a new disability living allowance.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many individuals in Northern Ireland received mobility allowance in each year since 1985; and how many applications for mobility allowance were turned down in each of the years.

Mr. Needham: The information requested is as follows:

Mobility allowance

Year	*Number of recipients*	*Number of claims disallowed*
1985	9,312	2,363
1986	10,470	2,597
1987	11,339	2,770
1988	12,616	3,462
1989	14,385	4,497

Social Fund

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the total number, and value, of *(a)* community care grants, *(b)* budgeting loans and *(c)* crisis loans (i) issued and (ii) refused, by each office of the Department of Health and Social Services Northern Ireland in each quarter since the social fund was established.

Mr. Needham: Information about the number of community care grants, budgeting loans and crisis loans processed each month, the number awarded and the amount paid for each social security office is available in the Library. The number of applications refused can be derived from these figures. However, information on the value of applications refused is not available.

Mr. Mallon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of individuals receiving income support are currently repaying loans from the social fund; and if he will give details for each office of the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: The proportion of individuals receiving income support and repaying loans from the social fund at 31 August 1990, the latest date for which information is available, was 17·12 per cent.

Details for each office are as follows:

Social Security Office	*Loans being repaid (per cent.)*
Andersonstown	35·97
Antrim	22·64
Armagh	15·71
Ballymena	16·42
Ballymoney	15·29
Ballynahinch	7·28
Banbridge	13·72
Bangor	9·92
Carrickfergus	16·20
Coleraine	18·87
Cookstown	14·17
Corporation Street	25·84
Downpatrick	17·94
Dungannon	12·30
Enniskillen	8·93
Falls	29·66
Holywood Road	15·07
Kilkeel	10·65
Knockbreda	10·90
Larne	21·68
Limavady	13·24
Lisburn	21·04
Londonderry	22·22
Lurgan	25·71
Magherafelt	15·53
Newcastle	10·24
Newry	15·06
Newtownabbey	15·80
Newtownards	11·24
Omagh	14·45
Portadown	15·62
Shaftesbury Square	20·56
Shankill	28·11
Strabane	14·14

Radio Scanners

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what regulations apply to the use of car telephones in Northern Ireland; what regulations apply to the use in Northern Ireland of radio scanners; whether he proposes seeking to extend or alter any such regulations; and what is his estimate of *(a)* authorised and *(b)* unauthorised radio scanner users in Northern Ireland;

(2) if he will list the names of those in Northern Ireland authorised to operate radio scanners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: The use of car telephone and radio equipment generally is governed by the same law throughout the United Kingdom and responsibility rests with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The Wireless Telegraphy Act 1949 requires the use of radio equipment to be licensed unless exempted. Receive-only apparatus (which includes scanners) is exempt. No authority is therefore required for the possession of a radio scanner; but it is an offence for any person without lawful authority to use such equipment to listen to any private message, or to disclose the content of any such message.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what investigation is being undertaken into how recent ministerial conversations by car telephone have been overheard; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Cope: Some implications of these reports are being addressed in a number of respects.

Mr. Madden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of his ministerial colleagues or officials have car telephones for official purposes; whether the number of such telephones are changed regularly; and who has access to such numbers.

Mr. Cope: Opportunities exist for making telephone calls to and from a variety of cars used by Ministers and officials. Access to the relevant numbers is limited on a "need to know" basis.

Gas Mains

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether he will recommend the retention of the existing gas mains network to Belfast city council.

Mr. Needham: No.

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he has on whether the existing gas trunk mains network in Belfast is capable of being adapted for natural gas distribution when a supply of natural gas becomes available in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Needham: Should a supply of natural gas become available the gas mains system could not be used for the distribution of gas without substantial expenditure on repairs, upgrading and renewal.

Fair Employment

Mr. Kilfedder: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the Fair Employment Commission will publish regular and frequent reports on the progress it is making towards achievement of fair employment as between Protestants and Roman Catholics within its own organisation.

Mr. Needham: In 1989 the then Fair Employment Agency published a report on the composition of its staff and the steps which it was taking to achieve fair employment. In October 1990, the Fair Employment Commission published a progress report. I understand that from May 1991 monitoring information on the r j 6-4religious composition of the Fair Employment Commission staff will be available on request.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Wormwood Scrubs

14. **Ms. Abbott:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next plans to visit Her Majesty's prison Wormwood Scrubs to discuss conditions.

Mrs. Rumbold: My right hon. Friend visited Wormwood Scrubs in March this year, when he discussed a number of matters with the governor and staff, including conditions in the prison.

Sunday Trading

15. **Mr. David Nicholson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he plans to take to reform Sunday and late-night trading.

20. **Mr. John Marshall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy on the regulation of Sunday trading.

Mrs. Rumbold: Since the defeat of the Shops Bill, the Government have made it clear that they are prepared to consider reform of the Shops Act 1950, short of total deregulation, if a solution can be found which is widely accepted, enforceable, practicable and likely to command a parliamentary majority. No such solution has yet emerged, but the Government continue to encourage interested parties to find common ground.

Police Constables

16. **Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many extra police constables have been appointed in Devon and Cornwall this year.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There were 24 more police constables on the strength of the Devon and Cornwall police at the end of October 1990 than there were at the end of October 1989.

Prisons Building Board

17. **Mr. Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of the Prisons Building Board in involving the private sector in the penal system.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Prisons Building Board, which includes three members from the private sector, is responsible for advising the Department on the delivery of the prison building programme, particularly new prisons. The expertise of the private sector members has proved very helpful in monitoring the progress of specific schemes.

As I announced on 11 July, I also propose to invite competitive tenders for the operation of the remand centre now under construction at Everthorpe, Humberside and for escorting prisoners to and from court. The Criminal Justice Bill now before Parliament makes the necessary provision for these changes.

Police Authorities

18. **Mr. Shersby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make an estimate of the total saving to public funds during the current financial year by police authorities in England and Wales as a result of their no longer having to pay domestic rates for police officers *(a)* in respect of police authority-owned accommodation and *(b)* owner-occupied housing.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The information needed to produce such estimates is not held centrally. The new arrangements protect the position of officers in service on or before 31 March 1990. Those who were in provided accommodation then are receiving an allowance of £300 per year for a transitional period of three years. Those in other than provided accommodation on 31 March are receiving a transitional rent allowance which includes an element for their former rates. Any savings in the current financial year are, therefore, likely to be very small.

Marriage Guidance Organisations

19. **Mr. Ian Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects his review into the level of grant in aid to marriage guidance organisations for the next financial year to be completed.

Mr. John Patten: It is completed. They will receive an increase of approximately 10 per cent. on their existing grants in aid. I have just announced a review of Government policy in relation to procedures for funding of marriage guidance organisations.

Calcutt Report

21. **Mr. Cartwright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with representatives of the press about implementation of the recommendations of the Calcutt report.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My ministerial colleagues and I have had informal discussions with a number of press interests on this matter.

Sentence Powers

22. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has to widen the powers of sentence available to the courts.

Mr. John Patten: The Criminal Justice Bill contains proposals to provide the courts with a wider and more flexible range of punishments in the community. These include powers to combine community service and probation, to impose curfews, and to link community with

financial penalties. The Bill also ensures that the courts continue to have adequate powers to pass custodial sentences on offenders whose offences warrant such sentences, or on whom such a sentence needs to be passed to protect the public from serious harm.

Debt-related Crime

23. **Ms. Richardson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women are currently in prison for debt-related crime.

Mrs. Angela Rumbold: On 30 June 1990, a total of 16 women were in prison service establishments in England and Wales for non-payment of fines.

Free Television Licences

24. **Mr. Skinner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will now introduce free television licences for all pensioners; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: We have no plans to introduce free or concessionary TV licences for all pensioners. That would be a crude and non-selective instrument of social policy which would benefit many people of pensionable age who are well able to afford the full fee.

Police Manpower

25. **Mr. Moate:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what are the latest figures for police manpower in the United Kingdom; and what was the position in 1979.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: My right hon. and learned Friend has responsibility for police forces in England and Wales. As at 31 August 1990 there were 127,024 police officers and 45,253 civilian staff, an increase of 15,531 police officers and 10,523 civilian staff since May 1979.

Building Design (Security)

26. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives are planned to incorporate security features in building design.

Mr. John Patten: Over the next 18 months, the ministerial group on crime prevention will, as one of its priorities, be concentrating on work to design out crime. Additionally, the Government are fully supportive of initiatives such as "Secured by Design", a police-led initiative which is currently running in the south-eastern and eastern regions. The scheme is designed to encourage housebuilders to consult police crime prevention officers when designing new houses. Housebuilders whose work conforms to police crime prevention standards are entitled to use a police-approved house security logo in their marketing. There are plans for the scheme to be adopted nationwide.

Rule 43 Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the number of inmates in prisons in England and Wales who were segregated under rule 43 on 1 November; and what was the period of time of each segregation.

Mrs. Rumbold: The latest readily available information is given in the table.

Prisoners held in prison service establishments in England and Wales under prison rule 43 and young offender institution rule 46 by type of segregation, age group, sex and current period of segregation, 31 March 1990

	Males		*Females*	
	Aged under 21	*Adults*	*Aged under 21*	*Adults*
Own protection				
Current period of segregation				
Up to 1 month	52	449	1	5
Over 1 up to 3 months	70	493	1	4
Over 3 up to 12 months	53	960	2	5
Over 12 months	6	189	0	6
All periods	181	2,091	4	20
Good order or discipline				
Current period of segregation				
Up to 1 month	44	116	2	8
Over 1 up to 3 months	9	43	0	1
Over 3 months	6	14	1	1
All periods	59	173	3	10
Total (Rule 43/46)	240	2,264	7	30

Juvenile Crime

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he proposes to take to reduce the level of juvenile crime.

Mr. John Patten: Some parents can do more to control their children's behaviour, and the emphasis on parental responsibilities in the Criminal Justice Bill will encourage them to do so. The Home Office is also considering with the DES what action needs to be taken to reduce truancy. In addition the Home Office safer cities programme is funding a number of schemes across the country aimed at providing educational and recreational activities for young people, and we envisage that local activities to occupy young people will be an important theme of our Crime Prevention Week 1991. This will be held from 15 to 20 April.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list grants and other support

made available by his Department to organisations, statutory and voluntary, that exist to tackle the incidence of juvenile crime; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: The Home Office safer cities programme, operating through 16 local crime prevention projects in England, makes grants for activities and facilities for young people to reduce their likely involvement in crime and anti-social activity. I will send the hon. Member a list. The probation service, which is 80 per cent. funded by central Government, is involved in some areas in crime prevention activities which may include juveniles. Some probation services supervise juveniles on court orders.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what research is being conducted by his Department into the cause of the current high levels of juvenile crime.

Mr. John Patten: The number of known juvenile offenders has fallen steadily over recent years by more than we would expect from purely demographic changes. Juvenile crime rates have fallen also. Much research has already been done on the cause of crime, including juvenile crime. The current emphasis is on projects aimed at helping young people become more responsible citizens.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support is available to families who are unable to control the criminal activities of their juvenile children.

Mr. John Patten: Under the Children Act 1989, there is provision for local authorities to make available advice, guidance, counselling and other services in respect of children in need in their area.

Dowries

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is his policy towards proposals to ban dowries in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement;

(2) how many representations he has received regarding dowries in the Asian community, and the exploitation of this practice; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Rumbold: The Home Office has received two representations about dowries, including one from the hon. Member. The Government are undertaking a number of initiatives to address the problem of domestic violence generally, but have no evidence to suggest that there is need to legislate specifically in connection with dowries.

Risley Remand Centre

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date he received a report from the Judge Tumim with regard to conditions for remand prisoners at Risley remand centre; what is the estimated cost of undertaking the changes proposed by Judge Tumim; and by what date he expects these to be completed.

Mrs. Rumbold: The report of Her Majesty's chief inspector on Her Majesty's remand centre Risley was received in April 1988 and published on 30 June 1988. Copies of the inspeetorate report were placed in the Library, together with copies of the then Home Secretary's response which set out proposals for action. It is not possible to give precise costs for all the various measures, but the redevelopment of Risley, on which work began in April 1989, is estimated to cost £63 million (at 1989 prices). The first two houseblocks should be ready for November 1991. It is expected that the full development of Risley will be completed by 1997.

I also refer the hon. Member to the then Home Secretary's reply to a question from the hon. Member for Warrington, North (Mr. Hoyle) on 25 July 1989 at columns *607-08* when, following the receipt of the Dunbar report, a copy of which is in the Library, he accepted the recommendation that the male remand function at Risley should cease. Since 15 October 1990 Risley has been a category C training prison for adult sentenced males. The women's remand prison will continue its function as before.

Arrest Warrants

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those police forces that *(a)* executed arrest warrants under the old rating system and *(b)* are executing arrest warrants under the community charge system to defaulters as a matter of course.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: This information is not held centrally. However, forces generally had a limited involvement with executing warrants under the rates system and it is anticipated that this will continue in relation to the community charge.

School Attendance

Mr. Peter Thurnham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parents have been successfully prosecuted for a child's non-attendance at school *(a)* in the Bolton education authority area and *(b)* nationally during each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. John Patten: It is not possible from the information held centrally to identify prosecutions of parents for a child's non-attendance at school from prosecutions for other offences under the Education Acts.

Exercise NOREX

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the scenario of Exercise NOREX; who are the anticipated protagonists in this scenario; and what is the estimated total cost.

Mr. John Patten: NOREX is one of a series of regional civil defence exercises. It will exercise certain United Kingdom civil defence plans in a situation where there is a fictional, non-specific, threat following unrest in Europe. There are no protagonists because the scenario does not include the outbreak of hostilities.

The exercise involves staff from central and local government, public utilities, the emergency services, and the military, for whom civil defence is a normal part of their duties. Establishing the total cost of the exercise would involve disproportionate cost.

Cable Television

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement concerning the regulations governing the use of cable television companies of opportunities given in the 12 gigahertz microwave band.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: The Broadcasting Act 1990, which will come into force on 1 January 1991, permits new local delivery operators to use microwave video distribution system—MVDS—in addition to or instead of cable. Under the transitional arrangements some existing cable operators have the right to apply to become local delivery operators and therefore to use microwave video distribution systems.

Last year, after wide consultation, the Department of Trade and Industry announced that the 40·5–42·5 gigahertz band would be made available to microwave video distribution systems and that further work would be done to see whether it could also be accommodated in the 11·7–12·5 gigahertz band.

This further work indicates that only very limited microwave video distribution systems would be possible within the 12 gigahertz band without displacing existing users. Officials from the Department of Trade and Industry are now consulting interested parties to see whether there is sufficient interest in such a limited operation and intend to make their conclusions known as soon as possible.

BSB-Sky Merger

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the merger of BSB and Sky Television.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier today to a question from the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland).

HMP Belmarsh

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff he now expects to be employed at Her Majesty's prison Belmarsh; in what grades; and how many of them will be recruited locally.

Mrs. Rumbold: It is expected that there will be 651 unified prison grades of which 80 will be recruited locally. There will also be 135 civilian workers of which 51 will be recruited locally.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his latest estimate of the number of staff at Her Majesty's prison Belmarsh who are likely to be seeking housing accommodation in the area.

Mrs. Rumbold: To date, 32 staff due to be employed at Her Majesty's prison Belmarsh have been identified as requiring accommodation. As the complete staff have yet to be allocated, it is difficult to estimate the final number, but it is expected to be between 200 and 250.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the housing authorities approached by his Department with a request to provide accommodation for staff at Her Majesty's prison Belmarsh, together with the number of units being made available in each case.

Mrs. Rumbold: Although it is not normally the policy of the prison department to provide accommodation, contact has been made with the following housing organisations:

(a) Thamesmead Housing—which states that it is likely to offer approximately six units of one and two bedroom flats, but this will depend on what is available at the time.

(b) Bexley Borough Council—which is prepared to consider offering accommodation but is not prepared to specify the amount at this stage.

(c) Probe—only initial contact made, but local follow up action to be taken.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the number of police officers of all ranks currently employed in the Metropolitan area; what is the comparable figure for 1978; what is the current average rate of pay for a police officer; what is the comparable figure for 1978 in real terms; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: There has been a significant increase in Metropolitan police strength and pay since 1978. The information requested is in the tables.

Rank	*Numbers*		*Percentage increase*
	August 1978	*August 1990*	*Per cent.*
Constable	15,798	21,494	36·06
Sergeant	3,704	4,443	19·95
Inspector	1,219	1,457	19·53
Chief Inspector	432	498	15·28
Superintendent	211	249	18·01
Chief Superintendent[1]	199	168	−15·58
Commander[1]	51	35	−31·37
Deputy Assistant Commissioner[1]	16	15	−6·25
Commissioner and Assistant Commissioners	4	6	50·00
Total	21,634	28,365	31·11

[1] Reduction in numbers at these ranks due to structural changes following force reorganisation.

Pay and percentage increase in real terms

Rank and service	*September 1978* £	*September 1990* £	*Percentage increase in real terms*
Constable (4 years)	4,017	14,463	41·29
Sergeant (4 years)	5,301	19,896	47·17
Inspector (4 years)	6,369	23,673	45·88
Chief inspector (4 years)	7,134	26,205	44·16
Superintendent (3 years)	9,333	33,369	40·32
Chief Superintendent (3 years)	10,326	36,276	37·88
Commander (Max)	10,949	[1]40,278	44·38
Deputy Assistant Commissioner (Max)	13,196	[1]45,894	36·50
Assistant Commissioner	16,336	[1]57,366	37·82
Deputy Commissioner	17,984	[1]65,025	41·90

[1]Does not include additional 2·5 per cent. increase for officers with over 3 years service in rank—approved in September 1990 and payable from 1 August 1991.

Electoral Registration

Mr. Harry Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when form RPF 32B was introduced; how widely it is used; what form it replaced; and whether there was any material difference between the old and new forms.

Mrs. Rumbold: Form RPF 32B was introduced in 1968, and did not replace any earlier form. It is used by less than half the electoral registration officers in England and Wales, but I understand that many others produce their own version of it.

Mr. Roy Hanney

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Metropolitan police commissioner as to what action is being taken against police constables Tony Egan and Richard Ramsay regarding *(a)* police constable Egan's alleged assault of Mr. Roy Hanney and *(b)* alleged perjury by the two officers in the case relating to Mr. Hanney at Southwark Crown court in early November.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I understand that an officer has been appointed to investigate the allegation of assault made by Mr. Hanney and Ms. Nicola Todd, and that this officer has invited Mr. Hanney to attend for interview to discuss this and any other matters which he may wish to raise.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 16 November 1990

ENERGY

Gas Disconnections

Mr. Riddick: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy when he intends to meet the Director-General of Ofgas to discuss the cut-off of gas supplies to consumers.

Mr. Moynihan: I regularly meet the Director General of Gas Supply and discuss a range of issues of mutual interest. We have noted that the level of disconnections for debt are at their lowest level since records were kept.

Energy Generation

Mr. Harry Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he has any new plans for the generation of energy; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Moynihan: Energy paper 55, "Renewable Energy in the United Kingdom: The Way Forward", published in 1988, set out the Department of Energy's strategy for the development of renewable energy to the year 2000. As stated in the Government's White Paper, "This Common Inheritance", my Department intends to carry out a review of its strategy next year.

Electricity Privatisation

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what provisions he will make to cancel the flotation of the electricity distribution companies and refund investors' cheques if war breaks out in the Gulf after first dealings day on 11 December.

Mr. Baldry: It would not be feasible to cancel the flotation after 11 December.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer of 12 November, *Official Report*, column *74*, covering the period leading up to first dealings day, if he will make arrangements with the Governor of the Bank of England to refund money to small investors investing in the flotation of the electricity distribution companies, in the event of war breaking out in the Gulf after first dealings day on 11 December.

Mr. Baldry: We have no plans to do so.

Electricity Supply

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy if he will discuss with the 12 chairmen of the area distribution companies a date for the replacement of the RPI-X formula for calculating the annual price increases for the franchise customers of the electricity supply industry.

Mr. Baldry: No. The arrangements for price regulation are specified in the public electricity supply licences and are overseen by the Director General of Electricity Supply.

Sizewell B

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy what is his most up-to-date estimate of the price of electricity from the Sizewell B nuclear power station in the period up to the expiry of the contract on 31 March 1998 with the Non-Fossil Purchasing Agency acting on behalf of the 12 regional electricity companies.

Mr. Baldry: The nuclear contract determines the price of output from all nuclear power stations, including Sizewell B. The details of this contract are commercially confidential.

Non-fossil Fuel Obligation

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy, pursuant to his answer of 12 November, *Official Report*, column *76*, how many schemes submitted for inclusion in the renewable tranche of the non-fossil fuel obligation have not formed contracts with the 12 regional electricity companies; and what is the total generating capacity of these schemes.

Mr. Baldry: Details of the projects initially submitted by generators for contracting within the non-fossil fuel obligation were given in a parliamentary written answer by my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State for Energy on 5 July 1990 at column *669*, to which I refer the hon. Member. Details of the projects actually contracted were given in my parliamentary written answer of 30 October 1990, at columns *443-44*. Those projects which proved not ready to contract under this year's renewables order will have a further opportunity under a renewables order which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State proposes to make next year.

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT

Rain Forest Conservation

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the value of work undertaken for the Overseas Development Administration on rain forest conservation by the Hydrological Institute at Wallingford.

Mrs. Chalker: The Institute of Hydrology is at present working on one rain forest project for the ODA. This is a study of the impact of deforestation on climate, which began in September 1990 in northern Brazil. It is supported by a £2·46 million grant under our technical cooperation programme with Brazil. The study is of considerable importance to the better understanding of the effects of deforestation on the climate. It has made an excellent start and I have every confidence in the institute's ability to carry it out successfully.

Rain Forests and Arid Land

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what extra aid, above that already earmarked is to be devoted to rain forest and arid land work, as a result of the Minister for Overseas Development's attendance at the Anglo-Brazilian environment conference in Brasilia, and Projecto Nordeste.

Mrs. Chalker: The conference was designed to be action-oriented in its outcome. The conference report will

therefore contain a series of project profiles which will be made widely available for consideration by possible donors in the public and private sectors. The ODA will certainly be among those giving serious attention to these possibilities.

The ODA is also giving preliminary consideration to the Projecto Nordeste proposal recently presented by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and its Brazilian collaborators. It is a substantial proposal and will require most careful attention.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Local Authorities (Balances)

Mr. John D. Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was the balance in the general revenue account at the end of the year ended 31 March 1989 and 31 March 1990 in each of the 26 local councils.

Dr. Mawhinney: The information is as follows:

Balance in favour of general revenue account

Council	*Year ending 31 March 1989*	*Year ending 31 March 1990*
Antrim	1,403,138	—[2]
Ards	[1]486,799	—[2]
Armagh	588,583	[1]641,617
Balleymena	555,410	[1]345,258
Ballymoney	172,776	[1]244,024
Banbridge	422,603	491,425
Belfast	2,317,206	[1]1,194,417
Carrickfergus	[1]531,524	[1]355,879
Castlereagh	160,178	[1](324,000)
Coleraine	526,084	453,494
Cookstown	690,229	734,330
Craigavon	1,134,976	[1]1,271,489
Derry	942,476	989,296
Down	600,462	[1]785,166
Dungannon	450,869	[1]405,158
Fermanagh	351,517	337,264
Larne	249,027	[1]46,803
Limavady	556,662	[1]637,473
Lisburn	587,269	[1]1,189,860
Magherafelt	44,297	52,640
Moyle	660	[1]81,709
Newry and Mourne	[1]1,360,239	[1]1,613,383
Newtownabbey	[1]613,733	[1]781,029
North Down	421,703	[1]190,762
Omagh	25,707	[1]7,932
Strabane	[1]192,281	[1](84,721)

[1] Uncertified.
[2] Not available.
( ) Indicates balance against.

Fair Employment

Mr. Charles Wardle: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action he proposes to take to enable individual complaints of discrimination in employment to be properly examined.

Mr. Needham: I have written to interested parties seeking their views on what changes may be needed in the fair employment legislation to enable complainants to have access to the information which is necesary for a case to be fully considered and determined.

A copy of this consultative paper has been placed in the Library.

Ordnance Survey

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the application of next steps to the Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Brooke: The Ordnance Survey of Northern Ireland has been indentified as a candidate for executive agency status. Drafting of the framework document has begun and work is under way to establish how soon the agency can be launched.

DEFENCE

TA Reservists

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list by year for the last 10 years the number of Territorial Army reservists who have *(a)* died and *(b)* been injured while on service.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The information requested is not held centrally and can be obtained only with disproportionate cost and effort.

Low Flying

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will introduce a system whereby RAF authorities warn areas in the flight path of low-flying aircraft in advance so that nervous and sick people can make preparations.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I regret that such a system would not be practicable for routine military low-flying training which is conducted on a day to day basis, as weather and other considerations allow.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to control and cut back the number of low-flying aircraft circulating south-east Gwent.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: I have no plans to do so although the United Kingdom low-flying system is kept under continual review and changes are made when necessary, reflecting changes on the ground, and aimed at spreading low flying more evenly and enhancing flight safety, while at the same time reducing, where possible, the disturbance to those on the ground.

Mr. Roy Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from farmers in Wales concerning low-flying aircraft.

Mr. Kenneth Carlisle: Several such representations have been received by the Ministry of Defence over the past year.

RAF Hospital, Ely

Sir Eldon Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to provide facilities to compensate for the reduction in facilities for civilian national health service patients at the Royal Air Force hospital in Ely and to provide the hands on training of Royal Air Force medical personnel at the nearby former Royal Air Force hospital in Newmarket.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: As I have previously announced, the Princess of Wales RAF hospital Ely will close by 31 March 1993. The regional and district health authorities are responsible for the provision of alternative facilities for NHS patients and we will be discussing appropriate arrangements for the rundown period with them. Royal Air Force medical personnel will continue to train in other Royal Air Force hospitals in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Air-launched Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is his policy on negotiations to limit air-launched nuclear weapons in the Atlantic to Urals region.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: There are currently no negotiations under way on the limiting of air-launched nuclear weapons in the Atlantic to Urals region. In common with our NATO allies, we seek to maintain the lowest and most stable level of nuclear forces needed to secure the prevention of war.

British Food

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it the policy of his Department and United Kingdom based defence establishments to purchase wherever possible British-produced food.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: The Ministry of Defence awards contracts for food items on the basis of the best compliant tender received in competition. In practice, almost all contracts for food items are placed with United Kingdom suppliers.

Exocet

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the exchange of information between the United Kingdom and France on counter measures to Exocet guided weapons; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Exocet is in service with the Royal Navy. The information we have about the missile system has allowed us to develop counter-measures which can be employed by our forces if necessary.

The Gulf

Mr. Cyril D. Townsend: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is making preparations for further deployment of British Forces in the Gulf.

Mr. Archie Hamilton: Following my right hon. Friend's visit to the Gulf, the Government is looking at options for deploying further forces to the area. Decisions will be announced soon.

As an immediate step, we will be reducing the notice to move for some army units and two mine countermeasure vessels as a contingency measure to ensure that any deployments can be made as quickly as possible once final decisions are made. Other possibilities remain under consideration.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Strangeways Prison

Mr. Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will give a summary of the costs to be met by *(a)* his Department in relation to the incident at Her Majesty's prison Strangeways, Manchester earlier in the current year and *(b)* those costs which will fall on the Greater Manchester police authority.

Mrs. Rumbold: The costs incurred to 31 October 1990 as a result of the incident at Her Majesty's prison Manchester are £4·1 million.

Of this sum, £3·55 million will be borne by the Home Office and £0·55 million by the Greater Manchester police authority.

Subversive Behaviour

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what definition of subversive is used by his Department; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Waddington: Subversive activities are generally regarded as those which threaten national security and which are intended to overthrow or undermine parliamentary democracy by political, industrial or violent means.

Immigration

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether being a bridesmaid constitutes compelling and compassionate circumstances under the current immigration guidelines;

(2) whether being a bride or bridegroom constitutes compelling and compassionate circumstances under the current immigration guidelines.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Each case is considered on its merits, taking all the relevant circumstances into account. Paragraph 10 of the guidelines on handling of representations by members of Parliament in immigration cases gives examples of the sort of exceptional and compelling circumstances which would justify deferment of removal, but these examples are not exhaustive.

Incidents (Media Film)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received urging that police requests for media film should relate only to cases where they are pursuing a specific arrestable offence and not to gathering intelligence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: I have recently corresponded on this subject with representatives of the media. It is for the courts to decide whether a police application for access to journalistic material satisfies the criterion that it is likely to be of substantial value to the investigation of a serious arrestable offence.

Small Shops

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received over the current late night and Sunday trading

practices of small shops; and whether he has any plans to protect small shops from any prosecution under the Shops Act 1950.

Mrs. Rumbold: In the past three months we have received 13 petitions, with 11,285 signatures, from shopkeepers in support of the OPEN campaign to allow small convenience shops to trade in their full range of goods from early until late on seven days a week. We have also received eight letters of support through Members of Parliament.

The Government have no plans for early legislation to repeal the Shops Act 1950.

Police Activities

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from senior police officers concerning the implications of their forces' involvement with the poll tax collection system for their other police operations; what indication he has of the costs to police forces of this poll tax involvement; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Home Office officials have been in contact with the Association of Chief Police Officers about the resource implications of police involvement with enforcement of the community charge. However, it is anticipated that, as with the rates system, that involvement will be limited and no central assessment of the costs has been made.

Woking Parks and Pleasure Grounds

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to approve the draft byelaws relating to parks and pleasure grounds which have been submitted to him by Woking borough council.

Mr. Peter Lloyd: Home Office officials wrote to Woking borough council on 5 October, asking for a number of minor amendments to be made to the draft byelaws. If the council agrees to these changes and submits a revised draft, we shall then be able to give provisional approval to the byelaws.

EDUCATION AND SCIENCE

Schools (North Yorkshire)

Mr. Cabom: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science how many staff and pupils there are in north Yorkshire education authority's schools.

Mr. Fallon: The information requested for maintained nursery, primary and secondary schools in north Yorkshire education authority in January 1990 is as follows:

	Full-time equivalents
Staff[1 2]	5,590·4
Pupils[3]	96,906·0

[1] Total number of full-time equivalent teachers employed by the local education authority including student teachers and instructors.
[2] Excluding non-teaching staff. Information on non-teaching staff is not available centrally.
[3] Numbers of pupils in 1990 is provisional.

Education Committees

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science what guidance he has given as to whether, under sections 13 and 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, in determining political balance on an education committee of a local education authority a council should treat non-elected members of the committee as members of *(a)* the opposition, *(b)* the majority party or *(c)* an addition to both.

Mr. Fallon: Non-elected members of an education committee are not members of the authority. They are disregarded for the purposes of determining the proportion of seats allocated to political groups in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and of the Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990. Where, however, a political group has a majority of seats on an authority, that group is entitled to a majority over all other voting members (elected and non-elected) on the education committee.

Local Education Authority Staff

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Science if he will rank, for the latest year for which figures are available, by order, the percentage of non-teaching staff as a proportion of total staff in each local authority education department together with the following information *(a)* total teachers, *(b)* total non-teachers, *(c)* central administrative staff and *(d)* the percentage of school budgets retained by the local education authority from total spending on schools.

Mr. Fallon: Numbers of non-teaching staff employed in local authority education are collected quarterly by the joint staffing watch, managed by a group of representatives of local and central Government. The group publishes a joint press notice with DOE giving national figures and local authority employment totals, but these are not broken down by service in individual authorities. Agreement to publish the individual figures has been withheld in the past, by members of the group, but will be now sought with urgency. When permission is forthcoming, the full analysis will be placed in the Library.

Total teacher numbers for each local education authority in England are given in the Department of Education and Science Statistical Bulletin 5/90, available in the Library. The budget statements for 1990-91, published under section 42 of the Education Reform Act, give details of each local education authority's spending on central administration and other items. These details are being placed in the Library.

THE ARTS

Regional Arts Associations

Sir Thomas Arnold: To ask the Minister for the Arts what representations he has received about the future role and structure of the regional arts associations.

Mr. Mellor: I have received representations from a wide range of organisations and individuals about the proposals I announced on 24 September for strengthening the

effectiveness and accountability of the new regional arts boards to take on extended responsibilities for grant-giving. I have also received representations from leading arts organisations and individuals about proposals from leading arts organisations and individuals about proposals for the devolution of some Arts Council clients to the new RABs. I am awaiting advice from the Arts Council on both issues before taking final decisions.

TRANSPORT

M11 Link Road

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what regard he had in approving expenditure on bridge 230 at Dyers Hall road and the re-routing of the gas mains along Cambridge Park road and at the Green Man, to the fact that the decision to build the M11 link road has not yet been taken, pending the outcome of the recent public inquiry;

(2) what is the cost of *(a)* building Bridge 230 at Dyers Hall road and *(b)* re-routing of the gas mains along Cambridge Park road and at the Green Man in preparation for the building of the M11 link road in east London; and who will bear the cost if the proposed link road is not authorised.

Mr. Chope: The decision to build the link road was taken when orders confirming the line of the new road were made following public inquiries held in 1983 and 1987. The recent public inquiry was solely into objections to the acquisition of land and rights including open space required to construct the link road.

My Department is bearing the costs of the advance works and these are estimated at *(a)* £2·007 million + VAT for the reconstruction of bridge 230; and *(b)* £1·13 million + VAT for the diversion of the gas main.

Central Line (Fire)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will call for a report from London Regional Transport on the reasons for the fire on the Central line in east London on 8 November, on how long it took to deal with it, on the effect upon commuters and what steps are being taken to endeavour to stop a recurrence; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Freeman: London Underground Limited (LUL) tells me that brake dust in the westbound tunnel between Leyton and Stratford was ignited by sparks from the current collectors of a passing train.

The London Fire Brigade was called and while they dealt with the incident the service was suspended between Leytonstone and Liverpool Street, at which point trains were turned back. The suspension of service commenced at 09.18 westbound and 09.42 eastbound; both were resumed at 10.53. Services throughout the day were then irregular due to the disruption to train and crew working arrangements.

LUL has a number of initiatives in hand to reduce tunnel fires including using brake blocks which give off less dust, reducing the arcing which occurs at current collector shoes, and increasing tunnel cleaning both by manual and mechanical means.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what restrictions apply on trunk roads to *(a)* pedestrians on or beside the road, *(b)* erection of crash barriers, *(c)* cycling on the road, *(d)* other types of traffic on the road, *(e)* parking on the road and *(f)* stopping on the road.

Mr. Chope: Traffic restrictions, including stopping and parking provision on trunk roads, vary according to local circumstances. They derive from the prevailing traffic regulation orders under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and are indicated by traffic signs and road markings in the normal way. Changes are subject to statutory procedures for consultation and public advertisement. Installation of safety fences in central reserves is not obligatory on trunk roads but there is a programme to extend safety fencing to most dual carriageways.

Hazardous Materials (Transport)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has any plans to strengthen controls governing the transport by lorry of hazardous materials; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The regulations are reviewed regularly by the Health and Safety Executive in consultation with the Department of Transport. They are amended as appropriate.

Road Humps

Mr. Gerald Bowden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether his Department will be issuing guidance to local authorities on the new road hump regulations which came into effect on 13 April.

Mr. Chope: My Department has completed consultation on the new circular roads and traffic advisory unit leaflet in respect of the Highways (Road Humps) Regulations 1990 and copies are now being circulated to local highway authorities. I have placed copies in the Library.

East London River Crossing

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what evidence he has received from the London borough of Greenwich that the proposed widening of the east London river crossing to dual three lanes between the A13 and the Thamesmead spine road will lead to the eventual widening of roads in Eltham, Sidcup, Plumstead and Bexleyheath; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Chope: The Department's proposals are currently the subject of public inquiries being held in Stratford, east London. Evidence is submitted to the inspector for his consideration. All evidence including that submitted by the London borough of Greenwich is available for consultation at the Inquiries libraries at Plumstead and Stratford. This evidence will be considered by the Secretary of State for the Environment and myself when we have the inspector's report.

Mr. Cartwright: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate his Department has made about increased traffic on roads in Greenwich as a result of the proposed widening of the east London river crossing to dual three lanes between the A13 and the Thamesmead spine road.

Mr. Chope: The Department's traffic forecasts show that increasing the width of the bridge from 10m to 11m to provide full dual three-lane standard will have very little effect on traffic flows on roads in Greenwich. For example it is forecast that traffic on the A2016 Western way in the morning peak in 2001 will increase by only 1 per cent. as a result of the widening.

Learner Drivers

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to be in a position to publish the conclusions of his Department's research into the accident liability of learner drivers, with particular reference to those who have recently passed their test.

Mr. Chope: A report on the accident and offence rate of newly qualified and learner drivers is scheduled for July 1992. A final report linking these results to drivers' training and testing experience will follow in March 1993.

Docklands Light Railway

Ms. Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he has made a decision about proposals to extend the Docklands light railway to Lewisham and Greenwich.

Mr. Freeman: No decision has yet been taken on this proposal. I have already made it clear that a Bill to authorise the extension can only be deposited this year if the project can be privately financed.

British Rail

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he next intends to meet the chairman of British Rail to discuss forward planning by the board.

Mr. Parkinson: I met the chairman of British Rail on 15 November and we discussed a number of railway matters. Planning is a matter for the board, acting on lines settled from time to time with me.

NATIONAL FINANCE

Metropolitan Water Board 'B' Shares

Mr. French: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about compensation due to Metropolitan Water Board 'B' stockholders since 1958; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Maude: None.

Tubes Seizure (Teesport)

Sir Hal Miller: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Customs and Excise have taken a decision on prosecutions in the case arising from the seizure of tubes at Teesport; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Ryder: At Sheffield magistrates court on 15 November the Commissioners of Customs and Excise withdrew the prosecutions against the two individuals charged with offences in relation to this matter under the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979. I have arranged for copies of what was said to the court on behalf of the commissioners to be placed in the Library. I understand that the commissioners do not envisage conducting any further inquiries.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Strategic Mineral Stockpile

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will state the organisations who have shown an interest in purchasing contents from the strategic mineral stockpile; and what financial return he hopes to obtain.

Mr. Leigh: I am unable to state who has shown an interest in purchasing material from the stockpile for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Redmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the contents of the strategic mineral stockpile.

Mr. Leigh: No. It is the Government's intention to sell the strategic mineral stockpile over the next two to three years while causing the minimum disruption to the market. Revealing the contents of the stockpile or giving an estimate of its value would have a deleterious effect on prices for those minerals listed or presumed to be in the stockpile.

Money Lenders

Mr. Janner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether he will introduce legislation to place a ceiling on annual percentage rate levels legally chargeable by licensed money lenders.

Mr. Leigh: It would not be helpful to impose a maximum interest rate, since no single rate could be appropriate to the wide range of credit transactions undertaken by licensed money-lenders. However, the Government proposes, as soon as Parliamentary time becomes available, to strengthen the provisions in the Consumer Credit Act 1974 under which courts have the power to reopen credit bargains which they consider extortionate. It is proposed to allow courts to reopen credit bargains on their own initiative rather than, as at present, solely at the request of the debtor or surety.

Share Certificates

Sir Geoffrey Finsberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he proposes to take to ensure that small shareholders who may wish to retain, as of right, share certificates in a company, are not outvoted by institutional shareholders.

Mr. Redwood: Subject to my being satisfied that the interests of small shareholders will be properly safeguarded, I expect the regulations now being drafted to provide that no company may put its shares into TAURUS unless its shareholders have passed a special resolution to that effect. An extraordinary resolution will be needed if a class of shares or any other kind of security is to become uncertificated. In both cases a three-quarters majority will be required. The proportion of private to institutional shareholders required to achieve such a majority will vary from company to company.

Firework Displays

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to the number of public and semi-public firework displays held on and around 5 November for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* Information as to the number of public and semi-public firework displays are not kept by my Department.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has as to the number of fireworks-related injuries sustained by *(a)* display organisers and *(b)* bystanders on and around 5 November for each of the last 10 years.

Mr. Leigh *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* The figures for overall injuries at displays were published in the *Official Report* at columns *613-16* on 21 March 1990, but injuries to display organisers and bystanders are not separately identified. However, the Government encourage organised firework displays as a generally safe way for the public to enjoy fireworks.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Benefit

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what provision he has made to avoid clawback on invalidity benefit for mothers eligible for the £1 per week increase in child benefit for first children;

(2) what proposals he has to avoid clawing back all or part of the £1 per week increase in child allowance for the first-born from those already eligible for overlapping benefits from other welfare payments.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: It is proposed that the £1 per week increase in child benefit for the elder, eldest or only child in a family should be taken into account in determining the rate of benefit or rate of increase of benefit payable in respect of that child. It is intended that the adjustment should be made under regulations to be laid before this House in due course.

The effect of the proposal is that the net rate of child's special allowance, guardian's allowance and child dependency increases of unemployment, sickness, invalidity and widow's benefits, retirement pension, severe disablement and invalid care allowances and unemployability supplement for the child for whom the higher rate of child benefit is payable would be increased to £9·70 per week from April 1991.

The proposal is based on the general principle that rates of benefit should reflect the overall level of support payable for a child. This principle has been adopted by successive Governments since 1948.

Mr. Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultations he undertook with specialist welfare organisations before announcing the form and content of his £1 per week uprating in child benefit for the first-born.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did not consult specifically about the decision to increase child benefit for the only, elder or eldest eligible child from next April, we regularly meet with and receive representations and views about social security, including child benefit, from many welfare organisations.

Residential Care

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will state the numbers of claimants of *(a)* residential care support benefits and *(b)* nursing home support benefits since 1979.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: The numbers of people claiming income support supplementary benefit in residential care and nursing homes since 1979 are in the table:

Year	*Residential Care Homes*	*Nursing Homes*	*Total*
December 1979	—	—	12,000
December 1980	—	—	13,000
December 1981	—	—	13,000
December 1982	—	—	16,000
December 1983	—	—	26,000
December 1984	—	—	42,000
December 1985	55,000	15,000	70,000
February 1986	70,000	20,000	90,000
August 1986	75,000	28,000	103,000
May 1987	84,000	32,000	117,000
May 1988	103,000	44,000	147,000
May 1989	119,000	56,000	176,000
May 1990	125,000	64,000	189,000

Notes:
1. Prior to December 1985 the figures are not sufficiently reliable for the total to be subdivided into residents in residential care homes and nursing homes, and therefore only the overall total has been given.
2. Figures for November 1979-December 1984 are taken from the annual statistical enquiry, figures for December 1985-May 1990 are taken from the quarterly statistical enquiry.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will state the residential care benefit maximum for each year since 1979 and index this rate against inflation, taking 1979 as the base;

(2) if he will state the nursing home benefit maximum for each year since 1979 and index this rate against inflation, taking 1979 as the base.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard: Prior to 1985, limits for residential care and nursing homes were set locally. From April 1985 the present system of national limits was introduced. The table shows the national limits since April 1985 in cash and indexed terms to August 1990, using April 1985 as the base.

	April 1985		November 1985		July 1986		April 1987		April 1988		April 1989		April 1990		August 1990	
	Cash limit	Real index	Cash limit	Real index	Cash limit	Real index	Cash limit	Real index	Cash limit	Real index	Cash limit	Real index	Cash limit	Real index	Cash limit	Real index
Residential care homes																
Elderly	110·0	100·0	120·0	107·8	125·0	110·5	130·0	110·0	130·0	105·9	140·0	105·5	150·0	103·3	155·0	104·3
Very dependent elderly*	—	—	—	—	140·0	123·7	145·0	122·7	155·0	126·3	155·0	116·8	165·0	113·6	170·0	114·4
Mentally ill	120·0	100·0	130·0	107·1	130·0	105·3	130·0	100·8	130·0	97·1	140·0	96·8	150·0	94·7	155·0	95·6
Drug/alcohol dependent	120·0	100·0	130·0	107·1	130·0	105·3	130·0	100·8	130·0	97·1	140·0	96·8	150·0	94·7	155·0	95·6
Mentally handicapped	140·0	100·0	150·0	105·9	150·0	104·1	150·0	99·8	160·0	102·4	165·0	97·7	175·0	94·7	180·0	95·1
Physically disabled under pension age	170·0	100·0	180·0	104·6	180·0	102·9	190·0	104·1	190·0	100·1	200·0	97·5	210·0	93·6	215·0	93·6
Others	110·0	100·0	120·0	107·8	125·0	110·5	130·0	110·0	130·0	105·9	140·0	105·5	150·0	103·3	155·0	104·3
Nursing homes																
Elderly and others	138·6	100·0	170·0	121·2	170·0	119·2	175·0	117·5	185·0	119·6	190·0	113·6	200·0	109·3	210·0	112·1
Mentally ill	148·6	100·0	180·0	119·7	180·0	117·7	180·0	112·8	185·0	111·5	195·0	108·8	200·0	102·0	210·0	104·6
Drugs/alcohol dependent	148·6	100·0	180·0	119·7	180·0	117·7	180·0	112·8	185·0	111·5	190·0	106·0	200·0	102·0	210·0	104·6
Mentally handicapped	168·6	100·0	200·0	117·2	200·0	115·3	200·0	110·4	200·0	106·3	205·0	100·8	215·0	96·6	225·0	98·8
Physically disabled under pension age	198·6	100·0	230·0	114·4	230·0	112·5	230·0	107·8	230·0	103·7	235·0	98·1	245·0	93·5	255·0	95·0
Terminally ill	198·6	100·0	230·0	114·4	230·0	112·5	230·0	107·8	230·0	103·7	235·0	98·1	245·0	93·5	260·0	96·9

Notes:
Real value indices are measured with reference to movements in the all-items RPI between each uprating date.
All indices take April 1985 as 100.
* Limit for very dependent elderly was the same as the limit for the elderly in April 1985.

WALES

Welsh Language

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales for how many documents or forms he has made orders under the provision of section 2(1) of the Welsh Language Act 1967 during the past 12 months; and if he will list these documents or forms.

Sir Wyn Roberts: No orders have been made under the provisions of section 2(1) of the Welsh Language Act 1967 but three orders have been made using the provisions of section 2(2) of the Act. These orders are as follows:

SI 1990 No. 293—The Community Charges and Non-Domestic Rating (Demand Notices) (Wales) Regulations 1990;

SI 1990 No. 1147—The Town and Country Planning (Listed Buildings in Wales and Buildings in Conservation Areas in Wales) (Welsh Forms) Regulations 1990; and

SI 1990 No. 1693—The Environmentally Sensitive Areas Designation (Wales) (Welsh Language Provisions) Order 1990.

The above orders prescribe a total of 21 Welsh forms or documents where Welsh is used as well as prescribing a variety of Welsh or bilingual forms of words for use in association with the relevant legislation.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Welsh medium primary schools there were in *(a)* South Glamorgan, *(b)* West Glamorgan, *(c)* Mid Glamorgan and *(d)* Gwent, in 1974 and at the most recently available date.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The information as at September 1989 is shown in the following table:

Welsh medium primary schools[1]

	Number
Gwent	6
Mid Glamorgan	29
South Glamorgan	9
West Glamorgan	19

[1] Schools having one or more classes where Welsh is the sole or main medium of instruction.

Data in respect of 1974 was not collected centrally.

Housing, Dwyfor

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on the basis of the latest information made available to him, how many private sector houses there are in Dwyfor district which are unfit by each of the definitions of unfitness by which this information is submitted by district councils to his department; and what proportions these represent of the total housing stock of the district.

Mr. Grist: The private sector stock in Dwyfor is 85 per cent. of the total. The council's housing strategy and investment programme for 1991-92 suggests that 2,109 private sector dwellings in the district are unfit.

Ministerial Advisers

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what requirements are placed on advisers to him who are paid from public funds in relation to their business interests and in regard to the declaration of such interests.

Mr. David Hunt: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave him on Tuesday 13 November.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Barry Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will give his most recent assessment of teacher vacancies in Wales in total and by education authority for *(a)* primary schools, *(b)* secondary schools and *(c)* all local authority schools, giving for each the number of posts vacant and the proportion of posts vacant.

Sir Wyn Roberts: The Department has undertaken two surveys of teacher vacancies this year. The results of the first, undertaken in January, reported 346 vacancies. Details are set out in the following table:

LEA	Vacancies		
	Primary	Secondary	Total
Clwyd	31	11	42
Dyfed	3	11	14
Gwent	33	46	79

LEA	Vacancies		
	Primary	Secondary	Total
Gwynedd	26	22	48
Mid Glamorgan	81	38	119
Powys	10	10	20
South Glamorgan	3	10	13
West Glamorgan	—	11	11
Wales	187	159	346

The second survey was undertaken at the start of the school year in September. Local education authorities reported the following vacancies in their areas:

LEA	Vacancies		
	Primary	Secondary	Total
Clwyd	2	—	2
Dyfed	4	2	6
Gwent	—	—	—
Gwynedd	—	—	—
Mid Glamorgan	10	5	15
Powys	—	—	—
South Glamorgan	2	4	6
West Glamorgan	19	6	25
Wales	37	17	54

The most recent information on the number of teachers employed by the local education authorities relates to January 1990 when 13,074 teachers were employed in primary schools and 13,298 in secondary schools.

SCOTLAND

Public Sector Properties

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if the Secretary of State will make it his policy to consult the district valuer and to treat his independent assessment of value as of paramount importance when arriving at a purchase price to be paid by private sector landlords acquiring former public sector or Scottish Special Housing Association properties under the housing Acts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: The purchase price to be paid by landlords acquiring tenanted public sector housing under the tenants' choice provisions of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1988 falls to be determined by reference to the provisions of section 58 of that Act.

Where a public sector landlord, including Scottish Homes, proposes voluntarily to dispose of tenanted housing to another landlord it is in the first instance for the body disposing of the stock to satisfy itself as to the acceptability of the disposal price. Guidance given to authorities with regard to voluntary disposals indicates that the district valuer should normally be invited to value the stock. In considering whether to give his consent to a disposal, my right hon. and learned Friend would wish to satisfy himself that the disposal terms taken as a whole offered acceptable value for money. He would expect to be guided by the district valuer's valuation and he would determine each case according to its merits.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what restrictions are to be placed on the title deeds of former public sector or Scottish Housing Association properties sold to alternative private sector landlords under the provisions of the current Scottish housing Acts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Landlords acquiring property from local authorities and new town development corporations by way of the voluntary disposal provisions require the consent of my right hon. and learned Friend to the subsequent disposal of such stock. He will wish to be satisfied that tenants have been properly consulted and will take account of their views.

Under Scottish Homes' voluntary disposal procedures, a condition of sale will be that the new landlord will seek the consent of Scottish Homes before the first subsequent sale can be effected. Before giving consent Scottish Homes will wish to be satisfied that tenants have been properly consulted and will take account of their views.

Similarly, landlords who acquire property from the public sector under the tenants' choice provisions will require to obtain the consent of Scottish Homes to the first subsequent disposal. Again, Scottish Homes will have regard to the views of tenants.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what powers are available to Scottish Homes to subsidise the purchase price as set by the district valuer to be paid by alternative private sector landlords acquiring the ownership of former public sector or Scottish Special Housing Association properties under the provisions of the current Scottish housing Acts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Under section 2(2)(a) of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1988, Scottish Homes has powers to pay grants provided that these have the approval of my right hon. and learned Friend given with the consent of Treasury or in accordance with a general authority. Authorities already in place enable Scottish Homes to pay housing association grant to registered housing associations and co-operatives to acquire and develop properties. In addition, Scottish Homes can pay grants to assist private developers and others in the provision of housing at market rents and for owner occupation. It is for Scottish Homes in the first instance to satisfy itself as to the grounds for providing grants in individual cases.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* the statutory steps which must be satisfied before an alternative private sector landlord may acquire the heritage of public sector or Scottish Special Housing Association properties under the provisions of the current Scottish housing statutes.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Private sector landlords can acquire tenanted public sector stock by 2 separate routes, either through voluntary disposal by the authority or through tenants' choice arrangements.

Voluntary disposal of local authority stock generally requires the consent of my right hon. and learned Friend in terms of section 12 of the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, as amended. Guidance given to local authorities on 27 September 1988 sets out the general criteria which my right hon. and learned Friend would expect to adopt when considering applications for consent to disposals of local authority stock. A copy of this guidance has been placed in the House Library.

In the case of Scottish Homes stock, my right hon. and learned Friend has already agreed with Scottish Homes the

procedures they will adopt in considering voluntary disposal of housing stock. A copy of the procedures is being placed in the Library of the House.

The tenants' choice route applies only if the tenants themselves individually choose to transfer. The statutory steps involved in the route begin with the approval of landlords by Scottish Homes. Before approved landlord status is given Scottish Homes will make a rigorous assessment of the landlord. Once an interest has been shown in acquiring stock the approved landlord will be free to approach the tenants concerned. The terms of the new assured tenancy will be agreed between the tenant and the new landlord.

Any new town development corporation tenant can choose to exercise tenants' choice.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps he proposes to take to ensure that all existing public sector tenants who are currently contemplating a change to an alternative private sector landlord are fully advised of all the implications of the result of the ballot to transfer from the public sector to the private sector landlord.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Transfers under the tenants' choice provisions are conducted on an individual basis and require the agreement of the individual tenants. There is therefore no need for a ballot to be held.

Guidance which we have given to local authorities considering voluntary disposals advises that when notifying tenants of transfer proposals they should set out the detailed implications of the disposal for the tenant. Such disposals do not necessarily require a ballot of tenants to be undertaken, but in considering any proposals put to him my right hon. and learned Friend will wish to be advised of the consultation undertaken with the tenants, the outcome of that consultation and the views expressed. His consent to disposal would be withheld where it appeared to him that a majority of tenants affected opposed the disposal. Therefore the holding of ballots is an important element in determining the views of the tenants.

Similar guidance regarding voluntary disposals has been given to Scottish Homes.

I attach a high priority to ensuring that tenants are well informed about the opportunities available to them. Scottish Homes has been strongly resourced for this purpose and I welcome its establishment of a panel of independent bodies to provide advice to tenants on specific proposals.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* any curcumstances where an alternative private sector landlord could be authorised by the Secretary of State to sell former public sector properties which had been acquired by the alternative private sector landlord via a process of voluntary disposal or tenants' choice under the provisions of the current Scottish housing Acts.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Where an approved landlord has acquired stock under the tenants' choice provisions and then seeks to dispose of the property he must take appropriate steps to consult the tenants involved and seek the consent of Scottish Homes. In determining whether consent should be given Scottish Homes is required to have regard to the views of tenants.

The subsequent disposal of stock acquired from a local authority under a voluntary disposal requires to be approved by my right hon. and learned Friend. Such approval can only be given where tenants have been adequately consulted and following consideration by my right hon. and learned Friend of the responses of tenants to that consultation. The subsequent disposal of stock acquired from Scottish Homes under a voluntary disposals would as a condition of contract require to be approved by Scottish Homes. This approval would only be given where tenants had been adequately consulted and having regard to tenants' views.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what criteria will be used to determine whether a ballot conducted to determine a change of landlord has been fairly conducted; and whether he has specified any circumstances in which he would approve a change from a public to private sector landlord in the event that such a ballot did not achieve a clear majority view among tenants in favour of any such change.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: A local authority considering voluntary disposal of tenanted stock is not required by statute to conduct a ballot as a means of consulting tenants. Guidance we have given to authorities advises however that in addition to notifying potentially affected tenants of proposals they may wish to organise a formal ballot to clarify views. In considering any proposals placed before him, my right hon. and learned Friend would take into account views expressed by tenants involved. His consent to disposal would be withheld where it appeared to him that a majority of tenants affected opposed the proposal.

Similar arrangements will apply to Scottish Homes. Moreover, the board of Scottish Homes has decided that it will not recommend a transfer to my right hon. and learned Friend unless there is a majority of tenants voting who vote in favour.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will list in the *Official Report* any existing rights that are available to tenants in public sector or former Scottish Special Housing Association houses as a result of the ownership of their houses being transferred to an alternative private sector landlord.

Lord James Douglas-Hamilton: Tenants transferring under the tenants' choice provisions will be free to negotiate with prospective landlords which rights they wish to secure in the event of transfer. Transfer will be on an assured tenancy basis.

Tenants affected by voluntary disposals will also transfer as assured tenants. The terms of transfer would be those agreed between the existing and prospective landlords and as detailed in the consultation process. Tenants would generally retain their existing right to buy and would have the right to be consulted prior to any subsequent disposal.

HEALTH

Hospital Beds

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what records are kept in district health authorities of people sent home due to lack of available beds; and which authorities do not keep such records.

Mr. Dorrell: This information is not available centrally.

GP Targets

Mr. Colin Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the practices covered by the Hereford and Worcester family health services authority have met the targets introduced in the general practitioners' new contract for *(a)* cervical cytology, *(b)* childhood immunisation and *(c)* boosters; how many minor surgery sessions they are anticipated to complete this year; how many children under five years have been registered for child health surveillance with them; how many health promotions sessions they will have; and how many patients they are likely to see in them by the end of March 1991.

Mr. Waldegrave: One hundred per cent. of the practices have reached a cervical cytology target, of which 84 per cent. have achieved the upper target. For childhood immunisation, 98 per cent. have reached a target, 67 per cent. achieved the upper target. For boosters, 97 per cent. reached a target, 57 per cent. achieved the upper target. The Family Health Services Authority (FHSA) expects 4,000 minor surgery sessions per year involving roughly 20,000 surgical procedures, thereby saving patients the inconvenience of attending out-patient departments. A total of 25,000 children under five in the county have now registered with GPs for child health surveillance and that number is growing daily. The FHSA has approved 12,000 health promotion sessions in its practices for the year; these will provide valuable advice for approximately 120,000 patients by the end of March 1991.

EC Health Care

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to remind British visitors to *(a)* France, and *(b)* other European Community countries that the validity of form E111, providing health care cover, is limited in individual European Community countries even though the form shows an unlimited validity so far as the United Kingdom is concerned.

Mr. Dorrell: Forms E111 issued by the United Kingdom have unlimited validity provided the holder continues to be ordinarily resident here. Guidance on the residence condition will be included in the Department's information leaflet when it is next revised.

NHS Trusts

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the commentary on the outcome of public consultation produced by each regional health authority.

Mr. Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the result of the consultation exercise carried out by the West Midlands regional health authority over Walsall district general hospital becoming a self-governing trust.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No.

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of the financial appraisal, undertaken by Coopers Lybrand Deloitte on his behalf on the financial viability of proposed national health service trusts.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No. These appraisals are confidential documents prepared in order to help inform my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's assessment of proposed national health service trusts.

Waltham Forest DHA

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when Waltham Forest district health authority first expressed an interest in being considered in the next round of opt-outs; what type of opt-out has been suggested; whether the proposal contains any timetable for public consultation; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: No units will "opt out" of the national health service: NHS trusts will remain firmly within the NHS.

An expression of interest in NHS trust status has been received from Waltham Forest health authority. The proposed trust would provide the acute and community services currently covered by the district. Public consultation will be undertaken by the regional health authority if or when a unit makes a formal application for trust status.

Beds

Mr. Robin Cook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each district health authority, regional health authority and for England as a whole the number of *(a)* acute beds and *(b)* non-acute beds on 31 March.

Mr. Dorrell: A booklet (Summary of bed availability England—1989-90) containing the information requested is shortly to be published. I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Student Nurses

Mr. Speller: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the starting salary of a student nurse under existing conditions and a student nurse on the project 2000 scheme.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The starting pay for a salaried student nurse outside London is currently £5,695 increasing by yearly increments to £6,630 in the third year of training. These rates will increase on 1 January 1991 to £5,800 and £6,750 respectively. Figures for student nurses in London are currently £7,279 rising to £8,261. From 1 January 1991, these rates increase to £7,384 and £8,381.

Project 2000 students receive the following levels of bursary, which are not subject to income tax and national insurance deductions;

	£
Under 26 at start of course:	
London	4,700
Elsewhere	4,000
Over 26 at start of course:	
London	5,200
Elsewhere	4,500

In addition to the above personal levels of bursary there are additions for dependants. These are means tested on the basis of Department of Education and Science mandatory grant rules.

Air Ambulance Services

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the funding of air ambulance services.

Mr. Dorrell: It is for health authorities to determine whether local circumstances justify operating an air ambulance service and, if so, to fund the services from their own resources.

Nurses (Grading)

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list for each district health authority the cost to district health authorities of successful appeals by nurses against their clinical grading;

(2) if he will list for each district health authority the total number of appeals at district health authority level by nurses against their clinical grading which have been *(a)* upheld and *(b)* rejected;

(3) if he will list in each district health authority *(a)* the total number of appeals lodged by nurses against their clinical grading and *(b)* the number of appeals which are still outstanding;

(4) if he will list in each regional health authority *(a)* the total number of appeals lodged by nurses against their clinical grading and *(b)* the number of appeals which are still outstanding.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: This information is not collected centrally.

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each regional health authority the total number of appeals at regional health authority level by nurses against their clinical grading which have been *(a)* upheld and *(b)* rejected;

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: The information requested is given in the table.

Regions	*Decision*		
	Allowed	*Disallowed*	*Failure to agree*
England			
Northern	7	4	27
Yorkshire	8	6	11
Trent	1	—	1
East Anglian	—	—	—
North West Thames	9	—	17
North East Thames	8	3	48
South East Thames	13	—	30
South West Thames	6	—	14
Wessex	—	—	2
Oxford	7	1	121
South Western	31	11	50
West Midlands	8	1	10
Mersey	1	—	2
North Western	14	1	23
Total	113	27	356

The Gulf (Casualties)

Mr. Douglas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the number of beds in national health service hospitals which are being prepared in anticipation of casualties which could arise from hostilities in the Gulf; and what proposals he has to fund such eventualities.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: In consultation with the relevant Government Departments, health authorities have reviewed their existing contingency plans for national health service treatment of military casualties in the event of war. Should it become necessary, beds would be made available through restrictions on non-urgent admissions. Contingency planning will be taken forward as necessary. The funding position can be reviewed if the need arises.

HIV

Ms. Harman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from organisations and individuals in respect of an out of court settlement for people who have contracted HIV through national health service infected blood or blood products.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley *[holding answer 12 November 1990]:* Since the beginning of August 1990, 106 such representations have been received.

ENVIRONMENT

Competitive Tendering

Mr. Knowles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received from the Heating and Ventilating Contractors' Association concerning compliance by the Nottinghamshire county council direct labour unit with the procedures and competition regulations laid down by the Local Government, Planning and Land Act; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Key: It is our policy not to reveal the identity of originators of complaints about failures by local authorities to comply with the requirements of part III of the Local Government Planning and Land Act 1980. My Department is, however, pursuing a number of matters with Nottinghamshire county council.

Minerals Extraction

Mr. Michael Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the average length of time taken to deal with planning appeals relating to *(a)* minerals extraction other than opencast coal mining and *(b)* opencast coal.

Mr. Atkins: The latest information available is for the financial year 1989-90 and is as follows:

Case type	*Number of cases decided*	*Median time from start to decision (weeks)*
(a) Minerals appeals other than open cast coal	49	37
(b) Open-cast coal appeals	9	40

Property Services Agency

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what representations he has received alleging loss of benefits and rights to civil servants from the planned transfer of the Property Services Agency to a wholly-owned Government company; if he will list the benefits and rights referred to and Her Majesty's

Government's response in respect of each benefit or right; what plans Her Majesty's Government has to extend the transfer proposal to other areas of work currently in the civil service sector; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: A variety of representations and requests for clarification have been received. No decision has yet been taken on whether the Property Services Agency should trade for a period as a wholly owned Government company or companies prior to sale. Employees' terms and conditions of employment would be protected by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981. Separate discussions are taking place on the new pension scheme that would be required to replace the principal civil service pension scheme; this will be broadly comparable with the existing scheme and staff will not be disadvantaged by any changes. Redundancy entitlements which are currently within the principal civil service pension scheme will be transferred as far as possible identically. I have no plans to include other areas of work in the privatisation of the Property Services Agency.

Protected Species

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which protected species in the United Kingdom may be taken under licence; and if he will produce a table showing for the last three years the number of licences issued to take otherwise protected bird species and the number of birds, by species, taken under such licences.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, licences may be issued, for certain purposes, to take any of the species to which the Act affords protection. Similar provisions apply under legislation in force in Northern Ireland.

The number of licences issued to take wild birds in the last two years, apart from those issued by the Nature Conservancy Council for scientific purposes, is shown in the table, with the numbers of birds taken.

	1988		*1989*		*1990*	
	Licences issued	*Birds taken*	*Licences issued*	*Birds taken*	*Licences issued*	*Birds taken*
Common Buzzard	33	27	3	1	1	1
Peregrine	10	12	5	6	3	3
Sparrowhawk	49	46	2	3	—	—
Crossbill	1	3	—	—	—	—
Snow Bunting	1	8	—	—	—	—

Travellers

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is his Department's policy with regard to local authorities with designated status which make no provision for protection for traveller mothers.

Mr. Key: The Secretary of State expects those authorities which are designated under the Caravan Sites Act 1968 to use their powers humanely, and with compassion; and he expects authorities with a shortfall of authorised gipsy sites to head Government advice that they should not needlessly move gipsies from place to place.

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what plans his Department has for ensuring that there is adequate site provision in London to meet the needs of the increasing population of gipsies and travellers.

Mr. Key: The Caravan Sites Act 1968 placed a duty on London borough councils, as well as County and metropolitan district councils, to provide adequate sites for gipsies residing in or resorting to their areas. The Secretary of State is keen for all authorities to fulfil their duty under the 1968 Act as speedily as possible. The Government provide 100 per cent. grant aid towards the reasonable capital costs of site construction.

Disabled People (Housing)

Mr. Alfred Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what housing provision for disabled people, as a percentage of the disabled population under 59 years, was made by each local authority at the latest date for which figures are available; and what steps he is taking to increase housing provision in the public sector for people with disabilities.

Mr. Michael Spicer: The number of dwellings for disabled people at April 1989, as reported by local authorities in their 1989 housing investment programme (HIP1) returns, appears in columns A2C1 and A2D1 of "HIP1 All Items Print (1989)", a copy of which is in the Library. The information for April 1990 is not yet available. The Department has no information in a readily accessible form on the number of disabled people under 59 years of age.

Disabled people may obtain assistance for house adaptations under the new house renovation grants system introduced in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, and this should help to increase the amount of housing suitable for people with disabilities.

Water Resources

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when he expects to receive the report on actual and prospective water resources in all regions of England, assessed against demand, which the National Rivers Authority has commissioned under section 143 of the Water Act.

Mr. Trippier: The National Rivers Authority expects to publish a preliminary report early next year.

National Rivers Authority

Mr. Onslow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment in what circumstances planning authorities consult the National Rivers Authority before giving their approval to planning applications.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Article 18 of the Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1988, as amended, sets out the categories of development about

which local planning authorities are required to consult the National Rivers Authority before granting planning permission. The Department advises local planning authorities also to consult the NRA where development is proposed on a flood plain or wash land, on in an area which the NRA has indicated might be subject to drainage problems or be susceptible to inundation by the sea or to tidal flooding. Advice on development in flood risk areas is in DOE circular 17/82. It is important that local planning authorities take proper account of the NRA's recommendations. I am inviting the NRA to consider whether there is any need for updating of the current guidance in the light of developments since 1982.

Nature Conservancy Council Wardens

Mr. McAllion: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what progress is being made in the discussions on the outcome of the 1985 study of hours worked by Nature Conservancy Council wardens; and whether it is intended that those will be resolved before re-organisation.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Conditions of employment for the Nature Conservancy Council's wardens are a staff management issue for the council to consider in the first instance. Any major and long-term changes will need the agreement of the council's successor bodies, which are already in existence.

County Hall, London

Mr. Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what financial consequences for London's local authorities will result from the failure of the London residuary body to sell county hall before 31 October; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Portillo: The prospective purchaser did not complete the contract of sale. The London residuary body notified London boroughs on 25 October that there would be no general distribution of Greater London capital receipts this year. Since 1986-87 London boroughs have had the benefit of £486 million capital receipts distributed by the LRB from the sale of surplus ex-GLC property.

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total estimated cost to the London residuary body of proceeding, from 1 October, with the planning application for the change of use for county hall initially submitted jointly by itself and the County Hall Development Group; and how these costs will be met.

Mr. Key: A figure is not available because of the uncertainties attached to the future progress of the planning and associated applications. Such costs as are incurred are being met in the first instance from the London residuary body's own resources.

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether the London residuary body has estimated the demand for the meeting facilities at county hall and the income which could be derived from making them immediately available to potential users.

Mr. Key: No. The LRB's objective is to dispose of county hall.

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the feasibility study into the possible future uses of county hall, promised by the then Minister on 12 February 1985, Standing Committee G, column 1270, will be presented to Parliament.

Mr. Key: I will place in the Library a copy of the report which the London residuary body commissioned from Richard Ellis in February 1986 about the possible uses, marketing and disposal of county hall when the LRB decides to publish it. The report contains information that is commercially confidential.

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what is the total estimated cost per month to the London residuary body from 1 October of maintaining county hall; and how these costs will be met.

Mr. Key: The costs are a matter for the London residuary body. They will be financed from the residuary body's revenue balances.

Miss Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment whether any damage has been done to the fabric of county hall during the preparation for its transfer to new owners with vacant possession prior to 1 October.

Mr. Key: I am not aware of any damage to county hall.

Planning and Compensation Bill

Mr. Stevens: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment which provisions of the Planning and Compensation Bill are to be treated as having effect from the date of the Bill's publication.

Mr. Michael Spicer: Clauses 47 and 49 (home loss payments) are to have effect in relation to displacements occurring on or after today, 16 November 1990. However, no sum will be payable by virtue of these clauses until one month after they come into force (which under clause 55 will be on a date to be appointed by order after the Bill receives Royal Assent).

Clauses 25(2) and 42(2) provide for the repeal of section 114 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 158 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972 (compensation for planning decisions restricting development other than new development). Clauses 25(5) and 42(5) provide that these repeals shall have effect, or be treated as having effect, where the application for planning permission was made on or after today, 16 November 1990.

Clauses 25(3) and 42(3) provide for the repeal of section 27 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and section 160 the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1972 (compensation for refusal of consent to alteration, etc. of listed building). Under clauses 25(6) and 42(5) these repeals shall have effect, or be treated as having effect where the application for listed building consent was made on or after today, 16 November 1990.

Schedule 5 provides, inter alia, for consequential amendments of section 15 of the Land Compensation Act 1961, section 5 of the Land Compensation Act 1973 and section 107(4) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to have effect as specified from today.

Planning Procedures

Mr. Hayward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what conclusions he has reached in the light of his consultation on proposed changes to the procedures for designating simplified planning zones.

Mr. Michael Spicer: About 50 responses were received to the consultation paper published on 31 August. I shall arrange for copies of the responses to be made available in the library of the Department.

Our proposals for changes to the requirements for public consultation at the pre-deposit stage, and to adoption procedures, were generally welcomed. Suggestions as to the desirable scope of consultations on draft SPZ schemes will be taken into account when new guidance to planning authorities is prepared.

Some respondents expressed misgivings about the proposal that the holding of a public inquiry to consider objections to a draft SPZ scheme should be a matter for the planning authority's discretion. I have considered these responses carefully; but it has to be remembered that objectors to major planning applications which are not called in do not have a right to a public inquiry. SPZ schemes are in many respects analogous to such applications: it is appropriate that they should be treated in the same way. It will often be possible for planning authorities to do full justice to objections without the need for a public inquiry.

Some respondents suggested that it would be helpful for guidance to be issued on the circumstances in which we would expect a public inquiry to be held. I agree that there are circumstances in which it would normally be appropriate to consider objections at a public inquiry—for instance, where the SPZ scheme constitutes a substantial departure from the development plan or raises strategic planning issues; where the scheme is the subject of substantial local controversy; or where it involves a substantial area of land in the authority's ownership and there are objections to the authority's proposals. Advice on these lines will be issued to planning authorities when new guidance is prepared. It will make clear that in such cases my right hon. Friend will if necessary be prepared to direct that a public inquiry is held.

My conclusion is that we should press ahead with the streamlining of SPZ procedures which was proposed in the consultation paper. Appropriate amendments to the primary legislation have therefore been incorporated in the Planning and Compensation Bill, which is being published today.

Mr. Mans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment what decisions have been made on the proposals in his Department's July 1989 consultation paper, "Efficient Planning".

Mr. Michael Spicer: Nearly 500 responses were received to the consultation paper "Efficient Planning". The Government have considered them carefully. My right hon. Friend and the Secretary of State for Wales have decided to proceed with the following proposals, which are included in the Planning and Compensation Bill published today.

(a) a power for local authorities to turn away repetitive planning applications. This is a tactic used by a minority of developers. Outlawing it will be welcomed by people whose homes and neighbourhoods are blighted by the prolonged uncertainties which such applications can cause;

(b) a power for the Secretary of State to dismiss a planning appeal where the appellant delays unreasonably. This will discourage use of the appeals system as a tactical device, and reduce the burden of unproductive work for the planning inspectorate and local authorities;

(c) lifting the six-month time limit for prosecuting an applicant who makes a false declaration;

(d) rationalising the secondary legislation governing development control;

(e) simplifying the law on publicity for planning applications;

(f) a power for local authorities to impose after-care conditions on landfill sites; and

(g) extending to minerals waste tips the provisions for the review of minerals sites, abatement of compensation and after-care conditions.

I announced on 25 July that we intend to take forward the proposal to increase planning application fees progressively until they cover 100 per cent. of local authorities' development control costs.

I announced on 31 August that we propose to simplify the procedures for designating simplified planning zones. SPZs can be used to extend permitted development rights in a defined area, and we have concluded that a further power for local authorities to do this (the proposed local development orders) is unnecessary.

In the light of the responses to the consultation paper the Government have decided not to proceed with the following proposals:

(i) to allow the Secretary of State to determine the procedure to be used to decide a planning appeal. This would have removed the main appeal parties' long-standing right "to be heard". However, we do intend to introduce provisions which would enable appeal costs to be awarded against a main appeal party who insists "unreasonably" on being heard at a public local inquiry or a hearing in preference to the written representations procedure;

(ii) to give special permission for development by householders if the local planning authority takes no decision on a planning application within eight weeks;

(iii) dual jurisdiction for the local authority and the Secretary of State following an appeal against non-determination, and re-defining the point at which development is said to commence. We shall be considering further the technical aspects of these proposals;

(iv) charging for planning appeals. This was proposed as part of our policy to improve the efficiency of the appeal system. But we have decided to concentrate initially on the essential first step of making the planning inspectorate a next steps agency. This will improve the management of the process, to the benefit of all users—appellants, objectors and local authorities alike.

North Sea Conference

Ms. Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment when the Government intend to present plans to the delegates of the North sea conference in line with the North sea conference agreement, giving the techniques and methods for ending sewage sludge dumping; what techniques and methods he proposes; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Paragraph 56 of the UK guidance note on the ministerial declaration of the third North sea conference, a copy of which is in the Library, sets out the Government's commitment to end sewage sludge dumping at sea by the end of 1998 and how this will be addressed.

A copy of this note has been sent to Ministers of the other North sea states. The third North sea conference also agreed to invite the Paris Commission to undertake, "a review of alternative methods of handling and disposal of sewage sludge aiming at developing clean and low waste technology".

The Paris Commission has agreed to undertake this and is expected to report by 1992.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing (Grimsby)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many jobs in Grimsby depend on fishing: and what proportion of the Grimsby catch is haddock.

Mr. Curry: Landings of haddock by United Kingdom and foreign vessels into Grimsby in 1989 represented 4·7 per cent. of the total quantity landed and 5 per cent. of the total value of all landings into Grimsby.

There are estimated to be about 4,500 jobs in the fish catching and processing industry in Grimsby.

Agriculture Assistance

Mr. David Nicholson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received over the special assistance which other EC members provide for specific sections of agriculture, including horticulture, which are not part of general EC programmes and which are not replicated in the United Kingdom; whether such assistance can be continued after the single market comes into effect; and whether he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I receive representations from time to time about national aids paid in other member states. Such aids are subject to EC rules, and where there is evidence that an aid is not consistent with these rules my Department draws the attention of the European Commission to the matter. The EC's rules on national aids will not be affected by the single market.

Fish Quotas

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will indicate the tonnage of fish swapped with the Danes in the Fishery Council of December 1989 and his proposals for reviewing this in the 1990 Council.

Mr. Curry: As part of the final overall settlement which enabled the December 1989 Council of Fisheries Ministers to reach agreement on Community fishing opportunities for 1990, the United Kingdom, Germany and France transferred respectively 500 tonnes, 260 tonnes and 100 tonnes of their 1990 North sea cod quotas to Denmark. The outcome of the Council was very satisfactory to the United Kingdom and we secured all our major objectives. We will work hard to secure a satisfactory outcome to the December Council but we have yet to see the proposals it will be considering.

Bovine Somatotropin

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his present policy in respect of bovine somatotropin in the light of the views of the Veterinary Products Committee.

Mr. Maclean: My policy has not changed. No decision on licensing any bovine somatotropin product will be taken until the procedures laid down in the Medicines Act and EC Law have been completed. The decision will reflect advice received from the independent expert advisory bodies established by the Act.

Mr. Ron Davies: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the United Kingdom's representative on the European Community committee on veterinary medicines and products will be opposing the licensing of bovine somatotropin, following the recommendation on licensing of the Veterinary Products Committee.

Mr. Maclean: The committee on veterinary medicines and products is an advisory and not a licensing body. The United Kingdom representative's aim is to ensure that the committee on veterinary medicines and products's opinion fully reflects the Veterinary Products Committee's views.

Calves and Sheep

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give the latest figures for the number of *(a)* calves and *(b)* sheep imported from eastern Europe and the percentage of the British and European Community markets that these imports represent.

Mr. Curry: For the year up to August 1990 there have been no imports of calves or sheep into the United Kingdom from eastern Europe.

Set-aside and Extensification Payments

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether he has any plans to increase set-aside and extensification payments.

Mr. Curry: The set-aside scheme payments for permanent and rotational fallow were increased for the third year of the scheme which began on 1 October. The pilot beef and sheep extensification schemes were only introduced in July of this year. I have no immediate plans for further increases.

Milk Producers

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received requesting that milk producers with less than 200,000 litres of quota should be exempted from any proposed reductions in quota; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: None. The Commission has made no formal proposals for a cut in quota, although the market situation certainly necessitates corrective action.

Wool Board

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many new registrations have been received by the wool board in 1988, 1989 and 1990; and what percentage of new registrations are from farmers previously engaged in cereal production.

Mr. Curry: I understand from the British wool marketing board that new producer registrations have been as follows:

	Number
1988	8,000
1989	7,200
[1]1990	5,500

[1] To date.

The registration procedure does not record the previous occupation of producers registering. All producers with more than four sheep are required to register.

Beef Imports

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will give details of the monthly imports of beef from the Irish Republic to the United Kingdom for each of the past 18 months.

Mr. Curry: The information requested is as follows:

United Kingdom imports of fresh, chilled and frozen beef from the Irish Republic

	Quantity (Tonnes product weight)
1989	
March	7,784
April	9,060
May	6,569
June	11,958
July	6,301
August	5,213
September	8,348
October	6,906
November	8,184
December	7,395
1990	
January	7,549
February	6,822
March	8,704
April	8,134
May	7,117
June	3,127
July	3,112
August	4,363

Source: Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Green Pound

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received to make 1 January the date for the implementation of reductions in the green pound disparity; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: I have received numerous representations requesting that the devaluation of the green pound for sheepmeat agreed at the 1990 price settlement be brought forward to 1 January 1991. Green pound devaluations for individual commodities normally take place at the start of the marketing year for the commodity in question. The devaluations agreed at this year's price fixing have now taken place for all agricultural commodities except sheepmeat; the green pound devaluation for sheepmeat will take place at the start of the sheepmeat marketing year on 7 January 1991. I do not believe that there is a case for departing from the normal rules for green pound devaluations so far as sheepmeat is concerned; any change would in any case require a proposal from the European Commission and the agreement of the Agriculture Council.

Ewe Headage Payments

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about the limitation of ewe headage payments to existing numbers; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: We receive a wide variety of representations about the detailed operation of the rules governing the payment of sheep annual premium and hill livestock compensatory allowances. These rules are laid down by EC Regulation. We are not aware of any impending proposals from the European Commission to limit payments to existing ewe numbers.

Global Warming

Mr. Flynn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whether the relationship between European agricultural practices and global warming was raised at the European ministerial Agriculture Council on 12 to 17 November in Brussels.

Mr. Curry: The Agriculture Council scheduled for 12-13 November has been postponed until 27 November.

Bolton Visit

Mr. David Young: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was his programme in Bolton on Wednesday 7 November; and what was the cost of the visit including travel from London for him and his staff.

Mr. Maclean: My official programme entailed a tour of Morrisons' supermarket in Bolton, which formed part of a series of visits to assess food safety requirements in retail outlets and food distribution premises, and the opening of the Best Black Pudding in Great Britain competition. The cost of the visit, including travel costs for Ministry staff, was £231·20. I also attended a party-political lunch, for which there was no cost to the Ministry.

Broken Mouth Sheep

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about the payment of subsidies in respect of broken mouth sheep; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Curry: Payments to sheep producers under the sheep annual premium and hill livestock compensatory allowance schemes are confined to animals which comply with the detailed rules for those schemes. We do, from time to time, receive representations suggesting changes in those rules.

Plastic Materials

Mr. Michael: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to implement EC directive 90/128 on plastic materials and articles intended to come into contact with foodstuffs; and under the provisions of which Act of Parliament it will be implemented.

Mr. Maclean: I hope to go out to consultation very shortly on draft regulations under the Food Safety Act 1990.

Farmers

Mr. Nicholas Bennett: To ask the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information he has as to *(a)* the number of farmers and *(b)* the number of farmers under the age of 35 years who left the industry in each year since 1970.

Mr. Curry: Information on the number of farmers, partners and directors in the United Kingdom is published annually in "Agriculture in the United Kingdom" (before 1988 in the Annual Review of Agriculture White Paper). Data are not collected on farmers leaving the industry.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Burma

Sir David Steel: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action Her Majesty's Government propose to take in light of the continued harassment and detention of opposition leaders in Burma and the continued house arrest of Aung Sann Suu Kyi.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are in close touch with our EC partners and other like-minded countries about further measures to persuade the Burmese military regime to return to democratic civilian government and to release all political detainees.

Cambodia

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what is United Kingdom policy at the United Nations with regard to moves to ban the sale of arms to the Khmer Rouge; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: The cessation of outside military assistance to all Cambodian parties is an integral part of the framework for a comprehensive political settlement agreed by the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, including the United Kingdom. Both the United Nations Security Council and the United Nations General Assembly have unanimously endorsed this framework which is now being elaborated by the co-chairmen of the Paris international conference on Cambodia.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what changes have been made to United Kingdom foreign policy with regard to Cambodia over the past five years; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the replies given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Mr. Lester) on 8 November 1989 and 26 March and 25 July 1990, together with the statement that I made on 26 October.

Hong Kong

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' recommendations to the Hong Kong authorities in respect of *(a)* minimum internal space, *(b)* food and nutrition standards and *(c)* water and sanitation standards in Hong Kong have yet been met; and if he will make a statement about the current position.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the then Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 5 June.

Wherever possible, UNHCR recommendations have been adopted. In respect of food, nutrition, and water standards, this remains the position.

Although it has not yet been possible to meet recommendations on space standards and the provision of toilets, the expected opening in December of a new detention facility at Tai A Chau will, together with the relatively low arrival rate in 1990 enable some improvements to be made. Whether it will be possible to make further improvements in 1991, and thus to move even closer to UNHCR standards, will depend mainly on the inflow of new arrivals and the rate at which non-refugees can be returned to Vietnam.

Human Rights

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether Her Majesty's Government are setting any preconditions for British attendance at the Moscow human rights conference in 1991; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We shall agree to attend the CSCE conference on the human dimension in September 1991 in Moscow if the substantial progress made in the Soviet Union's human rights performance in recent years is sustained. We are keeping this under review.

Iraq

Mr. Warren: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will ask the French Government to investigate and report to the United Nations on whether any circumstances exist which require French assistance for Iraq's Exocet weapons systems; and if he will make a statement.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: This is a matter for the French Government.

The Gulf (Oilfields)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the United Nations has any plans to assess the safety and security implications for the oilfields in the Gulf area of possible conflagration.

Mr. Lennox-Boyd: We are not aware of any United Nations plans to carry out such an assessment. For our part, we are fully aware that hostilities in the Gulf would have serious consequences of many kinds. Hence our determination to bring maximum pressure to bear on Saddam Hussein to comply with the Security Council resolutions in order to resolve the crisis.

Soviet Union

Mr. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further plans Her Majesty's Government have to help the process of economic reform in the Soviet Union.

Mr. Douglas Hogg: We believe that the principal western contribution to economic reform in the Soviet Union should be multilateral. The European Community is committed to supporting reform in the USSR. Britain is pressing for concrete help in areas such as energy. The existing EC-USSR agreement provides a sound basis for greatly increased economic cooperation. We also look forward to the results of the IMF study of the Soviet economy which is expected to be ready by the end of the year.

In addition, the Government have decided to establish a know-how fund for the Soviet Union. This will draw on the experience gained from the existing know-how fund for eastern Europe, but will be distinct. Its aim will be to transfer to the Soviet Union British skills and expertise. Help will be provided in close collaboration with the British private sector and will be targeted on four key sectors:

—food distribution/agriculture
—energy
—small business formation
—financial services

An initial sum of £20 million over two years has been allocated to the Soviet know-how fund.

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OFFICIAL REPORT

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SESSION 1990-91

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SCOPE OF THE INDEX, ARRANGEMENT AND ABBREVIATIONS

This index is derived from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Information System (POLIS), and the subject terms used are based on those used in POLIS. There are often changes in column numbering, etc, between the daily part or weekly Hansard (which simply collects together the daily parts without revision) and the bound volume. The index for the bound volume is revised to take account of these changes and cannot therefore, be used in connection with the daily part or weekly Hansard. For these versions use the Fortnightly Index.

Scope and arrangement of the Index

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Rulings and Statements by Mr. Speaker and his deputies are brought together under the heading Speaker's rulings and statements.

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The date of each item except Parliamentary Questions is inserted immediately before the reference.

Members' names are given in the form by which they prefer to be known and are printed in bold italics. Under their names, entries are arranged under one of the two headings *Debates etc* (to include interventions on statements, points of order and so on) or *Questions*.

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